UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF LAW, ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

School of Education

Behind the Mask:
Education, Employment and the Life Stories of Gay Men

By

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For my two sons, Ben and Sam, who have travelled very different journeys,
to become the proud men they are today.

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I explore the life stories of five gay men. I begin by outlining the socio-political arena into which these men were born, through exploration of the history of the emergence of sexuality as a discrete entity. In so doing, I analyse how western society constructs sexuality, defining heterosexuality as 'normal' and thereby marginalising those not conforming to this construct. Further, I explore how hetero-normativity is reinforced, both through nurturing and within language and how this has impacted on the lives of the gay men involved in my research.

The narratives of these white, middle class, educated, gay men are then located within this context. Their lives span seven decades and, in making sense of their stories, I explore the influences that have impacted on their differing life experiences. This study, which has been influenced by biographical researchers such as Erben, Roberts and Denzin, seeks to give voice to these men who have lived part of their lives in silence, on the margins of society. I draw on the work of Roberts, who suggests that life stories create a new literature of experiences from those who do not usually reach the public arena.

Details are given of the open ended method of interviews employed, following the models presented by Roberts and Denzin and I explain the reasons for this selection. In addition, I discuss theories concerning the legitimacy of biographical research, in particular the views of Erben, that no life can be studied in isolation and further, that understanding the social context and using the researcher's imagination are both vitally important, alongside the analysis of empirical data.

I present some differing views on queer theory in order to inform my analysis. Following this, I present my findings from the interviews, drawing on both queer theory and the emergent common experiences of my participants. Finally, I provide a more nuanced explanation of these common experiences, such as: bullying, secrecy, alienation, coming out and filial relationships.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

'I'm not sure that 'truth' is a primary ingredient – is that a shocking thing to say? Maybe when the time comes, imagination will be as important as information. But one thing I will promise you: nothing will be put down on paper for years and years. History has to be made – before it's remade.'

Brian Friel, *Making History*
Act 1 sc i

The Purpose of my Research

I begin with a quote from Knight (2002:34) as it is pivotal to the motivation with which I began my research. 'Researchers operating within critical theory tend to hold that the social order in all its aspects perpetuates inequalities and that research should identify and try to erode them.' My study is of the life stories of five gay men. I firmly believe that they live, or have lived at some point in their lives, in a position of inequality within British society. Further, it is my contention that, in many ways, their lives have been made more difficult because of the ways western society constructs and perceives sexual identity in general and homosexuality specifically. I wanted to discover, through my research, whether they had common experiences which originated from their sexuality and indeed, whether the context into which they were born had a bearing on these experiences.

I work in the field of education in a sixth form college and in my pastoral role, I am in a position to introduce changes to raise awareness of inequality and hopefully, to nurture understanding and tolerance. This ability to institute change, albeit in a small and localised way, is, I believe something worth doing. Whilst I believe that challenging inequality and intolerance is the duty of all, I recognise that to generate such change, is a long, slow process. However, history has shown that it can happen with perseverance and persistence.

My Study

My study traces the lives and experiences of five gay, educationally successful, male participants. I define 'educationally successful' as having completed full time compulsory education, and then progressed to further training or higher education. I use the life stories of these men to explore the impact their homosexuality has had on their lives.

Stein and Plummer (1996:130) assert that 'empirical studies have tended to be unreflective about the nature of sexuality as a social category. Such studies tend to replicate social divisions, implicitly reasserting the exotica of difference.' However, I believe I have avoided this accepted replication of divisions by researching the emergence of homosexuality as a discrete entity and reflecting on many of the theories, more especially queer theory, surrounding this categorisation.

Although Kirsch (2000:1), in his introduction to queer theory and social categorisation writes, 'I cannot comment on the situation of others, whose experience I cannot know', I believe there is some value in research into homosexual experiences being carried out by a heterosexual, female researcher. While much of the literature concerning queer theory is written by gay and lesbian writers, in some instances, an 'outsider's' view can be not only valid, but perhaps more perceptive than someone directly affected by the divisive hetero-normativity within society. I write this study from the perspective of the mother of two sons, both totally different in character, interests and sexuality, one being gay and one being heterosexual. I have observed their very different experiences of growing up to become the mature young men they are now and my positioning is necessarily reflected in the study. I attempt to be objective, but I am not sure this has always been possible. Indeed, in the many drafts of this text, I have removed most of the emotive words as far as possible, in order to present a more objective study. I have been sensitive to the use of language in this study and go on to explore the choices I have made.

Language Use

Language usage is an important element of this study and one to which I have had to be particularly sensitive. Sedgwick (1991:4) identifies the differences she perceives in the language used to describe same sex attraction. She makes the distinction between "homosexual" and "gay" as modifiers and comments, 'There is, I believe, no satisfactory rule for choosing between the usages "homosexual" and "gay" outside of a post-Stonewall context where "gay" must be preferable since it is the explicit choice of a large number of the people to whom it refers'. The problem here is that although the word "gay" was owned and used by homosexual men, about themselves, and quite deliberately had positive connotations, it has now been adopted into general usage, but unfortunately as a perjorative adjective. Young people today use the word "gay" to describe objects in a detrimental way. More recently the word "queer" has been reclaimed and ownership has been taken for this word which was once detrimental and a term of abuse. Now it is used freely as a positive descriptor and the term queer theory has been adopted into the canon of research. However, I later discuss the problems inherent with the adoption of this word 'gay' by some gay men and not by others.

Sedgwick considers the term "homosexual" to stem from the medical research carried out in the late 19th century and describes it as diagnostic, thus imbuing it with clinical connotations.

This acknowledgement of the negative connotations attached to many words pertaining to homosexuality is taken up by Epstein and Johnson (1994:201) when they state that

> A clear indication of the embedded and ever-present nature of homophobic forms is the fact that there are no words for lesbian or gay sexuality which do not bear a hostile charge. Even those words which have been affirmed as a focus of positive identity and pride – such as 'gay' 'lesbian' and more recently 'queer' represent a terrain of struggle rather than a simple affirmation.

While I consider this to be a valid consideration, in my own writing, I have used both terms interchangeably without any specific consideration save variety. I feel that "gay" is more informal and has more positive connotations, but I do not distinguish between the two in my usage. However, I have preserved the choice of terms made by my participants and reproduced them in context.

Epstein and Johnson also suggest that there is no language to describe homosexuality that is not laden with value judgements. Indeed, Dale Spender (1980:18), when writing about the status assigned to certain words, recognises that whilst 'king retains its positive meanings, queen has also developed debased sexual connotations and now refers, in a derogatory way, to a gay man, with the constituent connotations of an effeminate parody of the female'. Further, she suggests 'the semantic derogation of women fulfils a dual function: it helps to construct female inferiority and it also helps to confirm it' (1980:23). This contention can also be assigned to the derogation of homosexual men within language.

Foucault's Contribution to The Emergence of Sexuality

Sexuality has not always been categorised in the same way as it is nowadays. In chapter 2 I explore the emergence of sexuality as a separate entity, using the work of Foucault (1976, 1984a, 1984b), who suggests that sexuality emerged in the 19th century, in response to the economic needs of a capitalist

society and the burgeoning realm of scientific discoveries. He posits that heterosexuality leading to procreation was necessary for the growing workforce and also that scientists were seeking to find, amongst other things, a seat for homosexuality. I also look at the work of Stone (1977) who conversely suggests that sexuality was defined much earlier than the 19th century and did not seem to be connected to industrialisation at all.

I examine the theories put forward by Foucault about the emergence of homosexuality as a label and as a category. If, as Foucault suggests, power is related to sex and sexuality, then it must follow that those on the periphery of sexuality in western society, lack the same degree of power assigned to heterosexuals. If this is the case, then the actions they take, the decisions made, must be decided upon from a lesser position of power and marginalisation. In a society such as ours, which has already constructed sexuality according to certain heterosexual criteria, this must leave a section of the population in a vulnerable and weak position, often with little chance of changing their situation.

When standing back and thinking rationally about this power struggle, it seems absurd that the sexual act should come into the equation. What people do in the privacy of their own homes, should have no bearing on society in general. However, evidence suggests it does. Foucault (1976:98) posits that 'one must not suppose that there exists a certain sphere of sexuality that would be the legitimate concern of a free and disinterested scientific inquiry were it not the object of mechanisms of prohibition brought to bear by the economic or ideological requirements of power.' Thus he suggests that sexuality and the structure of society are inextricably linked.

Jeffreys (1990:316) notes that we 'live in a society organised around heterosexual desire, around otherness and power difference' and she suggests that 'heterosexual desire is...sexual desire that eroticises power difference' (1990:2). Further she contends that 'the eroticising of power difference dominates male gay culture and sexual behaviour' (1990:3) because sexual equality is not exciting: it is the difference in the power structure which is erotic. She states that 'men do not escape the heterosexual construction of their desire simply by loving their own sex' (1990:2). In my study, I explore this construction and the impact the power difference has had on my participants.

Categorising Sexuality

In this study of the experiences of gay men, I approached the research as a product of a society which categorises sexuality. The men in my study are also products of this society, and have been conscious, from an early age, of their differences to the majority and have had an awareness that their attractions and desires were deemed wrong by most of the individuals and institutions of which they were a part. They learnt the need for secrecy, in order to be accepted. Ann Oakley (2002:8), when writing about the observations made by Patricia Williams who 'learnt to think of herself as Black [sic] at the age of three', went on to note that, 'none of the little white children who taught her this, ever learned to see themselves as white'. Oakley states that 'one exists within the ambit of a set of cultural conceptions; black people, or women, or children, or gays, have certain characteristics and a particular social place'. Oakley (2002:8) explores how Williams considered 'this distance between the self and the drama of one's stereotyping...[to be] an ethical project of creating a liveable space between the poles of other people's imagination and the nice calm centre of oneself where dignity resides.' Such consideration is evident in this study of gay men. Their reactions to the stereotyping and the ways in which they have had to deal with rigid societal expectations and related limitations, are key aspects of this research.

Simone de Beauvoir (1988:295) posits that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman...only the intervention of someone else can establish an individual as an *other.*' Thus she is suggesting that one is only aware of being different because of the comparison to, and the influence of, other people. This is equally true of women and of gay men, insofar as western society largely operates under the premise of white male heterosexual supremacy and those not in that category are, by and large, considered *other.* De Beauvoir explores this idea further and argues that 'insofar as he exists in and for himself, the child would hardly be able to think of himself as sexually differentiated,' unless he had a 'norm' against which to measure himself. It is this definition of 'norm' which positions the 'other' on the margins of society.

The Study in Context

This study is necessarily carried out in a modern context. While a study of the history of sexuality, and homosexuality in particular, can be illuminating about

differing attitudes, it presents difficulties. If drawn from centuries ago, it would be possible to utilise the ancient Greeks as role models. Their attitudes towards sexual orientation and behaviour were completely at variance with our own. Therein lays the difficulty – if we use the Ancient Greeks as examples of a more accepting and forgiving culture, then the other elements of their culture which would be abhorrent to us now, such as slavery, racism and misogyny, cannot be ignored.

To make any sense of biographical study, the life must be studied in the time and context of the here and now. We remain, unfortunately, rooted in a society which, in many instances, reviles homosexuality and which reinforces the idea that it is wrong. This reinforcement takes on many guises: we are bombarded by media images of heterosexual couples, church doctrine instils this sense of right and wrong, the English education system is geared up to instil heterosexual normativity and 'traditional' moral values perpetuate this homophobic and heterosexist culture. Many gay men reinforce this sense of abnormality, albeit inadvertently, when they go through the process of 'coming out' and revealing their sexuality to others. This very act acknowledges their compliance with the mainstream heterosexual presumption. Halperin (2002:10) states, when reviewing his own work in *One Hundred Years of Homosexuality,* that his

> aim was not to champion the cause of a homosexual minority that might be imagined to have existed in every human society, for to do that would be merely to pay heterosexuality the backhanded (and undeserved) compliment of being the normal and natural condition for the majority of human beings in all times and places. My purpose in historicizing homosexuality was to *denaturalize heterosexuality* to deprive it of its claims to be considered a 'traditional value' and ultimately to destroy the self-evidence of the entire system on which the homophobic opposition between homosexuality and heterosexuality depended.

A difficulty encountered with any study of homosexuality, is that the differentiation between homosexuality and heterosexuality is so deeply rooted in the consciousness of western society, that it is difficult to distinguish when this demarcation was adopted as a norm. Researchers are generally unable to

pinpoint a time in history when this was not considered a category worthy of note and therefore this skews understandings and functioning within society.

Halperin (2002:3) recognises this 'prominence of heterosexuality and homosexuality as central, organizing categories of thought, behaviour and erotic subjectivity'. He notes that the acceptance of these categories 'represents a relatively recent and culturally specific development, yet it has left little trace in our consciousness of its novelty.' Thus, with any study of sexuality, we may have difficulty separating 'what it is about our own experiences of sexuality that are not universal, what it is about sexuality that could be cultural instead of natural, historical instead of biological' (2002:3). Anything which is outside of our own domain, appears to us exotic, unusual or deviant, and bridging that gap of understanding is virtually impossible. This point is well made by both Halperin (1989, 2002) and Foucault (1976) and, in my study, I have acknowledged their investigations into the history of sexuality.

Outline of the Thesis

As previously stated, in Chapter 2 I explore the emergence of sexuality in the 19th century, and draw on the work of Foucault. In Chapter 3 I refer to the theorising of sexuality and, in particular, nascent queer theory. I do this for a number of reasons. I wanted to raise awareness of this school of theory for re-defining and re-visiting accepted norms within western society and to place my subjects within the context of these studies and attempt, in some measure, to explain their reactions to certain events in their lives which link to their sexuality.

Queer theory offers a way of re-assessing accepted norms, which in part makes it a useful device to make sense of the life stories told and, in so doing, can reveal how many of these gay men's experiences can be explained as a reaction to their sexuality.

In Chapter 4 I outline what I hope to achieve by my study and link this to a description of the men who participated in my research, together with my reasons for selecting them. In Chapter 5 I describe the ways in which my data was collected and explain the methodological choices made.

Chapters 6 and 7 are more extensive than the previous chapters, because these are pivotal chapters where the men give voice to their experiences. Chapter 6 focuses on detailed analysis of the five interview transcripts, considering common

denominators and differences in the men's stories. Chapter 7 continues this process by identifying and analysing common themes. Finally, in Chapter 8 I draw conclusions from the data and reflect on the process of the study.

It is to the next chapter where I explore the emergence of sexuality that I now turn.

Chapter 2

Nascent Sexuality

'Fennel. Lovage. Tarragon. Dill. Coriander. Borage...Don't plant the fennel near the dill or the two will cross-fertilize...You'll end up with a seed that's neither one thing or the other.'

Brian Friel, *Making History,*
Act 1 sc.ii

Introduction

This chapter seeks to place the identification and categorisation of sexuality into an historical context. In so doing, attention is drawn to the fact that contemporary western society places an importance on sexuality, insofar as there appears to be a constant need to place individuals into categories. The subjects of my study have defined their lives by the marginalisation they believe their sexual identity has placed upon them. Had they been born into a different era or context, their experiences might have been vastly different. Indeed, Erben (1998) suggests that a life cannot be studied out of context. Further, he quotes Ferraroti (1981:22) when suggesting that the social context of a life is part of the study. Ferraroti also argued that '...the effort to understand a biography in all its uniqueness [is also] an effort to interpret a social system' (cited in Erben 1998:7). Thus, in this chapter, I explore literature concerning sexuality, the definition of it and how the categorisation of people has had a far reaching effect in terms of life experiences, particularly for those defined, and who identify as, homosexual.

Sexuality before the Industrial Revolution

Sexuality is a defining category for many in western society. In contemporary western society, sexual identity is pivotal: we are conditioned and categorised by our sex. Foucault (1976:5) argues that this began with the 'advent of the age of repression in the seventeenth century' and continued to be the case with the emergence of scientific research in the late 19th and early 20th century. He suggests that as a result of this scientific research and the consequential categorisation, individuals who were attracted to members of the opposite sex were deemed to be 'normal' whereas those attracted to people of the same sex, frequently were not. Often these individuals were discriminated against, shunned and marginalised.

In terms of ancient civilisations, Greek and Roman attitudes to sex were vastly different and far more accepting. Indeed, both civilisations considered sex between the same gender to be both normal and socially acceptable. Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, were concerned, not with the type of sexual act, or with the gender of participants, but more with the frequency of the act. Having sexual relationships with either sex was acceptable, but excesses were not. These were judged on a par with gluttony when referring to food. Foucault (1976:44) notes that:

> It is rather rare when a notable personage is depicted, for his preference for one form of sexual practice or another to be pointed up. On the other hand, it is always important for his moral characterization to note whether he has been able to show moderation in his involvement with women or boys.

Defining Sexuality

According to Foucault (1976:25) 'one of the great innovations in the techniques of power in the eighteenth century was the emergence of "population" as an economic and political problem'. Governments began to study the population in terms of birth and death rates, life expectancy, illnesses, health and fertility, because of the needs of an industrial society. Stone (1977:23) further suggests that 'attitudes and customs which were normal for one class or social stratum were often quite different from those which were normal in another'. He posits that 'urbanization and industrialization profoundly affected the poor, but hardly impinged on the lives of the nobility'.

These Government studies included gathering information about sex and sexuality and, Foucault (1976:26) suggests, the 'sexual conduct of the population was taken both as an object of analysis and as a target of intervention'. People were placed into categories which, in part, legitimised the heterosexual relationship wherein the main function was pro-creation, thereby demeaning any other type of relationship which did not produce offspring. It was not economically efficient to have any other physical pairing. Further, Stone (1977:309) reveals that even 'the sixteenth century inherited from the medieval church a strong hostility to homosexuality, which...had become closely associated in official thinking with religious heresy'. Stone (1977:339) suggests these various changes in attitude 'do not seem to be connected to economic or political factors, but rather to cultural – and particularly religious – changes'. This seems to contradict Foucault's assertion that sexuality became an economic issue because of the demands for a workforce following the Industrial Revolution. Further, the scientific discoveries being made at that time created a need to define sexuality and to categorise people according to their sexual proclivity.

'Contrary Sexual Instinct'

Such moves appear to have coincided with the perception that same sex attraction was abnormal and studies were taking place in a burgeoning scientific environment, in an attempt to discover the seat of this so called sexual perversion. Indeed, it was at this time that the term 'homosexual' was coined and accompanied by negative connotations. The term was first introduced by Carl Westphal when labelling 'contrary sexual instinct' in his famous article of 1870, entitled 'Die Contrare Sexualempfindung' (Contrary Sexual Sensations) in *Archiv fur Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* (cited in Davidson 2001:16)[1]. Davidson suggests that the 'psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted' from that moment.

Westphal (cited in Davidson 2001:15) believed that 'contrary sexual instinct' was a congenital perversion of the sexual instinct, and that in this perversion, 'a woman is physically a woman and psychologically a man and, on the other hand, a man is physically a man and psychologically a woman.' Karl Heinrich Ulrichs corroborated this theory, stating that contrary sexual instinct was caused by a woman's soul dwelling in a man's body, thus linking three areas to sexual perversion; the soul, the brain and the psyche (cited in Davidson 2001:17-19).

By 1885, Krafft-Ebing had identified the existence of a sixth sense which he called the 'genital sense' (cited in Davidson 2001:11) and had established its source in the cerebral cortex. This further legitimised theories of sexual aberrations as a seat for these perversions.

In these studies by Westphal, Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing, homosexuality was categorised alongside acts of perversion such as necrophilia, bestiality, sadism, masochism and fetishism. These categories were already imbued with value judgements, and to place homosexuality alongside these was to apportion the same negative connotations. There seems to be no common denominator between these definitions, apart from the fact that none would necessarily lead to procreation, but were purely for sexual gratification. Krafft-Ebing (cited in Davidson 2001:15) argued that any sexual act which did not 'correspond with the purpose of nature i.e. propagation – must be regarded as perverse'.

[1] Although I obtained Westphal's article, I was unable to procure a translation and thus was obliged to draw on Davidson to some degree.

Defining Normality

Before perversion can be judged, there is a need to define what is normal. Further, the issue arises concerning who judges and defines normality. Davidson (2001) propounds the view that the definition pertaining to sexuality seems to have been taken as a unanimous decision, because there is no documented evidence of a debate on sexual practices in the early 19th century. Davidson (2001:xiii) avers that:

> It is not because we became preoccupied with our true sexuality that a science of sexuality arose in the nineteenth century; it is rather the emergence of a science of sexuality that made it possible, even inevitable, for us to become preoccupied with our true sexuality.

At this time of new scientific exploration and discovery, many facets of human existence were being scrutinised and explanations sought. The development of medical knowledge and anatomy in particular, meant that a physical source was explored to explain sexual deviations. A school of thought emerged, led by G. Frank Lydston, (1889) (cited in Davidson 2001:6 from *Medical and Surgical Reporter*) that perversion was caused by a physical malformation and a site for this had to be found. Accordingly, scientists sought to establish a physical phenomenon to explain what they saw as a mental aberration. No consideration was given to physical attraction or even love, for someone of the same sex. It was the physical act, devoid of feelings or emotions, which formed the topic of their investigations. Had they tried to trace physical attraction or love to a particular organ, they would have had similar problems whether it had been opposite or same sex attraction. When this identification proved impossible, medical writers of the day such as Ulrichs, and Krafft-Ebing, focused on supposed abnormalities of the brain to explain these aberrations in sexual behaviour. In 1878 Moriz Benedikt (cited in Davidson 2001:11) stated that:

> The brains of criminals exhibit a deviation from the normal type, and criminals are to be viewed as an anthropological variety of their species, at least among the cultured races.

Thus it was easy to develop this theory to include the brain of people attracted to members of the same sex, who participated in 'acts of sexual perversion'.

Freud's Contribution to the Theory of Sexuality

Freud has been hugely influential in all studies of sexual development, sexuality and assumed aberrations of the sexual act. His theory of the Id, Ego and Super Ego form the basis of much of his later research. According to Freud's theories, the conscious and unconscious mental life can be divided into the Id, the Ego and the Super Ego. In this theory, the Id is 'everything that is inherited, laid down at birth and instinctive within the subconscious' (Stafford-Clark 1965:112). If this theory of the Id is employed in biographical research then it is possible to appreciate that some base actions of the human personality are instinctive and beyond control.

The Ego is cognitive rationality, meaning that the Ego reacts to external forces and finds the most favourable and least perilous method of obtaining satisfaction. The Super Ego is the acceptance and respect of standards and ideals which are taught in a particular society and culture and which are accepted in that society as normal. Herein lays the difficulty for anyone in that society whose behaviour, which to them seems perfectly natural, but to the consensus of society seems unnatural.

Building on this idea of normality is Freud's idea of Repression, which he sees as 'the limitation of satisfaction' (Freud 1927). Repression is how ethics and morals develop, within the need to control natural feelings to gain cultural acceptability. According to Brennan (1992:185), 'Freud writes simply that the superego "owes its existence" to the repression of the hostility to the father and of desire for the mother.' This links with Young's (2001:5) theory that '... the vicissitudes of the Oedipus complex affect sexual orientation. A too strong attachment to a domineering mother, coupled with a weak or absent father, was a fundamentally important factor in the aetiology of male homosexuality...'.

Freud referred to homosexuality as 'Inversion'. His theory on this sexual predilection was that Inverts came in three categories: *absolute inverts* whose objects of sexual desire was always and exclusively to those of the same sex; *amphigenic inverts* whose desire was for either same sex or opposite sex but never exclusively one or the other and *contingent inverts* who, Freud believed, under certain circumstances, perhaps whilst in prison for example, could take a sexual partner of the same sex and derive satisfaction from that pairing, but only for the duration of that certain circumstance (Freud 1953a:138).

For Freud, homosexuality is rooted in unconscious homosexual or same sex directed fantasies and fears. Freud places the emphasis on truly unconscious as opposed to conscious thought and on psychological conditions. He distinguishes between latent and realised homosexuality. Part of his clinical treatment for homosexuality was to encourage latent homosexual men to return to a more active and fulfilling heterosexual relationship, particularly if they had never participated in a homosexual relationship. For Freud a latent homosexual could often be identified as having failing heterosexual tendencies or an inability to fulfil conjugal duties. Accordingly, by returning to the heterosexual haven, he could be saved from homosexuality. The man who was already an Invert, could not be cured and so analysis could only help him cope with his situation.

Freud, whilst identifying the Super Ego and labelling the Invert, still felt that homosexuality was a condition which needed to be cured or dealt with, in a predominantly heterosexual society. Whilst Freud formulated theories to explain the phenomena, and could identify that many feelings were involuntary and present at birth, he subscribed to the movement which sought to find a cure for homosexuality.

Davis suggests that there is evidence which implies that Freud himself had a homosexual relationship with Fliess. According to Davis (1995:113), Freud adopted a theory of Fliess's which was that 'the "root" of repression in conflict deriving from the inherent biological and psychic possibility that a person can make both homosexual and heterosexual choices of erotic object, what Fliess and others called "bipolarity".' Freud later confessed to Ernest Jones in 1912, midway through his work with the Wolf Man, in his ongoing memory of Fliess that, 'there is some piece of unruly homosexual feeling at the root of the matter' (cited in Davis 1995:114).

Legislation and the Struggle for Gay Rights

If it is assumed that British society has constructed sexuality according to hetero-normativity, then those marginalised by their sexuality must surely lack the power assigned to heterosexuals. If this is the case, then the action they take, and the decisions made, must be decided upon from a degree of powerlessness and marginalisation. In latter years there have been some changes in the legislation, but many issues remain to be redressed.

Gaining parity and fairness for homosexuals within western legislation has been a hard fought battle. Even now, although much headway has been made,

there is still some way to go to achieve equality. The hetero-normative presumption of western society was formalised by The Labouchère Amendment of 1885. The MP Henry Du Pre Labouchère proposed an amendment to the Criminal Law Amendments Act which made sex between men a crime. This amendment was passed and remained in place for 80 years. It stated that 'Any male person who in public or private commits or is a party to the commission of or procures or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of any act of gross indecency with another male person shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and being convicted thereof shall be liable to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years with or without hard labour.'

In January 1954, Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and his friend Peter Wildeblood, were arrested for homosexual offences. The subsequent case was particularly high profile, because Montagu came from an aristocratic family and Wildeblood was a political correspondent for the *Daily Mail*. Wildeblood caused a sensation in court by admitting publicly that he was a homosexual. This evoked public sympathy and approbation and highlighted that the law was out of step with public opinion.

However, it was not until 1957 that a parliamentary committee studying homosexuality, challenged the law. A report, sponsored by the government and led by Sir John Wolfenden, Vice-Chancellor of Reading University, suggested that homosexual behaviour between consenting adults should no longer be a criminal offence. The Wolfenden Committee, as it became known, came to the conclusion that outlawing homosexuality impinged upon civil liberties.

In 1958 the Homosexual Law Reform Society was founded. This was a homophile organization which campaigned in the United Kingdom for changes to the laws criminalizing homosexual relations between men.

It was not until 1967that the Sexual Offences Act received Royal Assent, partially decriminalising sex between men. The age of consent was set at 21 for gay men and 16 for heterosexuals. Sex between two men could only take place in private, and neither man could be in the Armed Forces or the Merchant Navy.

During the now famous Stonewall riots of 1969, police raided the Stonewall gay bar in New York. There ensued five days of riots between the gay community and police and these riots are considered, by some, to be the beginning of gay resistance to oppression.

This gay resistance movement continued and grew in strength. One major victory was the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973. The Association concluded that there was no scientific evidence to prove that homosexuality was a mental disorder and removed it from its register. However, the International Classification of Diseases of the World Health Organization did not follow suit until 1992.

In 1976 'The Naked Civil Servant', a drama based on the autobiography of Quentin Crisp, was shown on British television. There was some degree of sympathy for the main character who illustrated the harsh reality of his life as an openly gay man in Britain in the 70s. One of my subjects highlights this broadcast as a turning point in his own life, when he realised that he was not alone in his sexuality and there were others who felt the same.

In 1988, Section 28 was implemented. This was a controversial amendment to the Local Government Act 1986 of England and Wales, which stated that:

> (1) A local authority shall not: (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality; (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship. (2) Nothing in subsection (1) above shall be taken to prohibit the doing of anything for the purpose of treating or preventing the spread of disease. (Smith 1994:183)

This Amendment had far reaching implications for the pursuit of equality. In response to this Amendment, the group Stonewall was founded in the U.K. in 1989, the members of which became active in the struggle to repeal Section 28. Their aim, from the outset was 'to create a professional lobbying group that would prevent such attacks on lesbians, gay men and bisexuals from ever occurring again' (Stonewall 2008). Stonewall has since been instrumental in campaigning for equal rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual people.

By 1994, gay men and women were allowed to serve in the armed forces, albeit covertly, but it was not until 2000, that the government removed the ban on gay, lesbian and bisexual people serving openly in the Armed Forces.

In 2001, in an Amendment to the Sexual Offences Bill, the age 'at which a person, whether male or female, may lawfully consent to a homosexual relationship'

was lowered to16. This meant that for the first time in British legal history, the age of consent for heterosexual and homosexual men and women was the same.

Section 28 was repealed firstly in Scotland in 2000, and then in England and Wales by September 2003, thus homosexuality could, in theory, be discussed freely in schools. However, my interviewees suggest that there still remains a legacy of fear amongst some teachers, both heterosexual and homosexual, who are afraid to raise issues of homosexuality for fear of loss of employment.

In 2004, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 was repealed. Prior to this, men convicted of consensual homosexual sex under the Sexual Offences Act of 1956 were included on the Sexual Offenders Register. This repeal de-criminalised homosexual sexual acts, as long as both participants were over 16 and thus they were removed from the Register.

A milestone in the campaign for equal rights came in 2006 when Civil Partnerships become legal and enabled same-sex couples to register as civil partners, thus giving them the same legal rights as heterosexual couples.

The Legacy of Sexuality

This chapter has sought to illustrate the arena into which the subjects of my study were born. Some encountered a society which was ready to shun and marginalise any individual who was attracted to someone of the same sex. Others had very different experiences and found a more accepting society.

For the men in my study, laws had been made and repealed, outlawing their sexual orientation, even before they were aware of their sexual identity.

In the following chapter, I explore some of the theories pertaining to sexuality, in particular queer theory. I identify the problems inherent in the definition of queer theory and review some of the literature on this subject. This process informed my study to a certain extent, particularly in its early stages, whilst later, my research was driven by the information which emerged from the interviews.

Chapter 3

Theorising Sexuality

'Caution – deliberation – caution. You inch forward – you withdraw.
You challenge – you retreat. You defy – you submit.
Every important move you have ever made has been
pondered for months.'

Brian Friel, *Making History,*
Act 1 sc.ii

What is Queer Theory?

Queer theory is a rather nebulous term, difficult to define and its characteristics much disputed. However, it is a term which is recognised in the canon of research into sexuality. It is a method of enquiry which initiates re-interpretations of assumed concepts, and 'seeks to place the question of sexuality as the centre of concern, and as the key category through which other social, political, and cultural phenomena are to be understood' (Edgar and Sedgwick, 1999:321). It is for this reason that I have used queer theory as a springboard for my own research. I carried out my interviews with no pre-conceptions of the issues which would be raised. I wanted the pertinent, common topics to emerge unsolicited. However, using queer theory as a foundation, allowed me to re-interpret, revisit and review assumed concepts, from an alternative perspective.

To define queer theory is problematic. There are many and varied ideas about what queer theory is and the place it holds within the spectrum of theories. Kirsch (2000:2) notes that 'queer theory seemed to me a very tricky genre, a nexus of ideas that grew out of a myriad of social forces, successes and failures that have enveloped left politics and theory since the 1960s'. Kirsch (2000:33) suggests that,

> the *principle* of "queer" then, is the disassembling of common beliefs about gender and sexuality, from their representation in film literature and music to their placement in the social and physical sciences. The *activity* of "queer" is the "queering" of culture, ranging from the reinterpretation of characters in novels and cinema to the deconstruction of historical analyses.

Queer theorists such as Butler, Kirsch, Jagose and Tierney have revisited accepted interpretations of many aspects of culture and media and deconstructed them from an alternative queer point of view. Whereas other theorists have deconstructed and interpreted from, for instance, a feminist perspective or a Marxist point of view, queer theorists use sexuality as their focus.

For my research, in order to make sense of their work, I began by using Salih's introduction to Judith Butler as a springboard to unlock some of her more complex, and at times, seemingly inaccessible theories, she being deemed the founder of queer theory. With this assistance, Butler's ideas became more accessible and cogent.

According to Salih (2002:9) 'While gender studies, gay and lesbian studies and feminist theory may have assumed the existence of the subject (i.e. the gay subject, the lesbian subject, the female, feminine subject) queer theory undertakes an investigation and a deconstruction of these categories, affirming the indeterminacy and instability of all sexed and gendered identities.' She suggests that the emergence of this tenet was generated in the 1980s and 1990s by the hysteria surrounding the AIDS virus and the consequential anti-gay reactions. Much of queer theory has been influenced by the germinal work of Judith Butler and in chapters 6 and 7, I explore some of her theories concerning performativity and identifying as queer.

Another view of queer theory is given by Spargo (1999:9) who suggests that it is

> a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire. It is a diverse range of critical practices and priorities: readings of the representation of same sex desire in literary texts, films, music, images; analyses of the social and political power relations of sexuality; critiques of the sex gender system.

Stein and Plummer (1996:137) in their earlier work make similar points, but they suggest that the 'text of literature and mass culture shape sexuality'. Thus, if their suggestion is accepted, sexuality is not only shaped and established within literature and the media, but it is also represented in these mediums and it is this area that queer theorists investigate and analyse.

Whilst many theorists have tried to define queer theory, Stein and Plummer (1996:134) attempt to categorise some of the constituent parts of this body of theory. They contend that some of the 'hallmarks of queer theory' are

- a conceptualization of sexuality which sees sexual power embodied in different levels of social life... enforced through ...binary divides;
- the problematization of sexual and gender categories, and of identities in general;

- a willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality, and to conduct queer "readings" of ostensibly heterosexual or non-sexualized texts.

Stein and Plummer's categorisation gives a wide ranging view of queer theory and questions the acceptance of hetero-normativity, the construction of sexual categories, the political power associated with heterosexuality and the imperative to interrogate accepted readings. It is this imperative to investigate which is central to my study. My participants indentify, individually, certain experiences, which later emerge as common to all. Therefore my investigation is important in exposing these experiences, which might otherwise remain undisclosed and unacknowledged.

According to Epstein (1996:156)

> the assertion of the centrality of marginality is the pivotal queer move. Just as queer *politics* emphasise outsiderness as a way of constructing opposition to the regime of normalization as a whole, so queer *theory* analyzes putatively marginal experience, but in order to expose the deeper contours of the whole society and the mechanisms of its functioning.

This pivotal sense of marginality is central to the participants of my study and is revealed in later chapters, when their life stories are presented.

Whilst there are many contributors to the body of queer theory, there are also those who counter them. Jeffreys (1990:315) is one of the main contesters of queer theory and she posits that 'same-sex relationships do not automatically ensure a symmetry of power and privilege'. This calls into question the claims made by queer theorists that homophobia is generated by a differentiation in power between heterosexual and homosexual men.

Another point raised by Jeffreys (1990:315) when challenging queer theory is that by 'loving their own sex' gay men are in fact 'loving themselves' and she criticises 'narcissism [which] is seen as negative and dangerous'. She may have a point with this assertion, however, this is a rather simplistic assumption and other, more far reaching factors need to be considered. In the interviews conducted in this study, there is very little evidence of self love amongst the participants, in fact

quite the opposite. There is an overwhelming sense of self-loathing for some, at certain points in their lives, and certainly a sense of guilt and secrecy for them all.

However difficult it may be to define and specify exactly what queer theory is, it does have the value of raising many issues about the acceptance of certain noms in society and, by bringing queer studies to the forefront of theoretical arguments, it can afford some credibility and status to a minority group. Salih (2002:4) explains how Butler suggests that the nebulous nature of queer theory is beneficial to 'queer' group members, inasmuch as 'self-evident "truths" are often vehicles for ideological assumptions that oppress certain groups of people in society, particularly those in the minority or on the margins'. Salih (2002:4) in commenting on her work, suggests that part of her 'project is to prise such terms open, to contextualize and analyze their claims to truth, thereby making them available to interpretation and contestation.' It is this process of examination which discourages the acceptance of acknowledged values and encourages a re-definition of recognized classifications that I have engaged in throughout this study.

Whilst, as has been shown, there are many ways of interpreting this body of theory, it is impossible to define queer theory, without considering in detail, just what is meant by the term 'queer'. Although it is acknowledged that this term has been reclaimed by various groups, there is some dispute about which groups are actually encompassed under the heading. I now consider the usage of the word 'queer'.

Queer

The word 'queer' has been exhumed. It is a word which was traditionally one of detriment and abuse, and as such, virtually outlawed. However, it has now been reclaimed and used as a positive descriptor. Butler (1993:233) suggests that this deliberate 'appropriation of the term "queer"... means that it has been consciously converted from an insult into a linguistic sign of affirmation and resistance.' However, this must surely depend upon who is using it, to whom and in what context. Epstein (1996:153) also identifies this 'linguistic reclamation, in which a perjorative term is appropriated by the stigmatised group so as to negate the term's power to wound.'

The term 'queer' is thought to have been adopted in the early 1990s. It was necessary to adopt a category under which all gay, lesbian and transgender people

could unite in order to form a cohesive group to become politically active. This is not to suggest that, other than sharing a sexuality opposed to the presumption of hetero-normativity, there is anything else about the group which would constitute a recognised category. This categorisation is explained by Epstein (1996:153) thus

> "Queer" offers a comprehensive way of characterizing all those whose sexuality places them in opposition to the current "normalising regime". In a more mundane sense, "queer" has become convenient shorthand as various sexual minorities have claimed territory in the space once known simply, if misleadingly, as "the gay community".

He explains how useful the term can be, 'when you're trying to describe the community, and you have to list gays, lesbians, bisexuals, drag queens, transsexuals (post-op and pre) it gets unwieldy. Queer says it all.' Thus he suggests that, not only is the adoption of the term queer a stand against the perjoration of the term in the past, but also a convenient compilation of everyone who is not heterosexual. This definition seems to be accepted by many other theorists including Jagose (1996:1) who also suggests that it means more than just identifying a group. 'In recent years queer has come to be used differently, sometimes as an umbrella term for a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications and at other times to describe a nascent theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies.' However, Corber and Valocchi (2003:1) point out that 'Queer studies scholars have shown that desires, identities, and practices do not always line up neatly.' These discrepancies suggest that the term 'queer' is an overarching term which incorporates just about everyone who is not solely heterosexual.

However, it is wrong to suggest that the term 'queer' is universally accepted by all non-heterosexuals. Age and generational differences have some bearing on the acceptability of the term. Epstein (1996:153) suggests that the

> use of the term also functions as a marker of generational difference within gay/lesbian/queer communities. Younger queers may speak with resentment of feeling excluded by the established 'lesbian and gay' communities, while older gays and

> lesbians sometimes object bitterly to the use of the term *queer* which they consider the language of the oppressor.

Older generations have experienced oppression, marginalisation and, indeed, living outside of the law for some of their lives, and so their reaction to the term is understandably going to be different to the younger people who have not encountered this first hand. Thus it can be seen that defining all homosexual men under the umbrella term 'queer' is not always acceptable and perhaps they do not consider themselves a unified homogenous group at all. Indeed, none of the gay men in my study used the word 'queer' in any other way than to report homophobic comments directed at them. It still remains a perjorative term in many instances and not one which they adopt to describe themselves.

Corber and Valocchi (2003:1) sum up the inherent problem of labelling when they state that 'queer names or describes identities and practices that foreground the instability inherent in the supposedly stable relationship between anatomical sex, gender, and sexual desire.' This problem with names and labels is discussed in earlier work by Kirsch who considers that the classification of a person can have a detrimental effect because of the connotations associated with the category. Kirsch (2000:92) comments

> To have a label that is not accepted as equal to others in this culture is to be 'less than', producing marginalization and shame for those desiring to be on an equal par. Here marginality can become an identity in itself: if one recognizes and embraces the fact that one is marginalized, then there is no need to seek support.

Indeed, the difficulty with labelling is that, on the one hand it can give entry into an identifiable group, but on the other there can be a certain stigma attached to the tag. It also lends itself to stereotyping, which, as stated earlier, is not necessarily accurate, when in fact, sexuality may be the only common denominator which links the group.

Sexual Identity

Whilst for many queer theorists, the definition of queer has been shown to be problematic, it has been accepted as a method of categorisation by those

involved in this tenet. This, however, leads to another difficulty: the definition of sexuality. There is a bench mark by which we measure sexuality but, as Seidman (1996:201) suggests,

> queer theory analyzes the manner in which cultural texts privilege heterosexuality over other sexual identities, as well as how this estimation requires homosexuality. Moreover queer theory studies the dilemma implicit in this logic; the adoption of a "homosexual" position strengthens heterosexuality itself.

This idea of heterosexuality needing homosexuality in order to justify existence is also explored by Butler and Foucault. This is useful in studying sexuality groups – if you are assuming that heterosexuality is the norm, and then using homosexuality as the 'other', then you are in danger of falling into the trap of accepting hetero-normativity per se. Many other groups whose sexuality does not fall neatly into either camp, are thereby left out of the equation. Queer theory, encompasses all sexuality groups and all sub groups. It recognizes that sexuality is defined through the normalisation of heterosexuality, but goes on to question that categorisation.

Seidman (1996:13) further questions this point of reference. He considers that 'queer theory wishes to challenge the regime of sexuality itself, that is, the knowledges that construct the self as sexual and that assume heterosexuality and homosexuality as categories marking the truth of sexual selves.' He goes on to consider the breadth of that study when he posits that 'queer theorists view heterosexuality and homosexuality not simply as identities or social statuses but as categories of knowledge, a language that frames what we know as bodies, desires, sexualities, identities.' He further breaks down the idea of a homogenous homosexual group when he suggests that he 'take[s] as central to queer theory its challenge to what has been the dominant foundational concept of both homophobic and affirmative homosexual theory: the assumption of a unified homosexual identity' (Seidman 1996:11).

Whilst categorisation and the assumption that these groups have similar experiences and traits are useful to theorists when studying groups, Seidman (1996:199) questions this. He suggests a solution,

> Queer theory recognizes the impossibility of moving outside current conceptions of sexuality. We cannot assert ourselves to be entirely outside heterosexuality, nor entirely inside, because each of these terms achieves its meaning in relation to the other. What we can do, queer theory suggests, is negotiate these limits.

Thus, whilst we live in a society which operates on binary oppositions, the lines drawn between these divisions can be re-distributed. Stein and Plummer (1996:138) propose a variation on the study of sexuality by suggesting that 'homosexuality becomes the marked category; heterosexuality recedes into the background, normalised and naturalized. Queer theory's universalization of "queerness" and its willingness to look at the social construction of heterosexuality as well as homosexuality, reconceptualise sexuality...'.

There seems to be a general assumption that sexuality is fixed and the categories are rigid. However, as Epstein (1996:148) points out, when considering the famous studies of Kinsey, that 'homosexuality and heterosexuality lay on a continuum rather than being discrete categories.' There seems to be some credibility in this assertion when his study showed that '37 percent of the men in his sample reported having had at least one homosexual encounter leading to orgasm in their lifetimes.' This suggests that for some, sexuality is not a fixed but rather, a shifting phenomenon. Adrienne Rich (1993:227) also coined the phrase 'compulsory heterosexuality' to explain the rigid divisions between sexuality. Whilst her contention was to 'encourage heterosexual feminists to examine heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women' the phrase can equally be utilised by homosexual men to examine their position of inferiority within western society. I later refer to her work in chapter 5 when exploring man made language.

Important Figures in the Realm of Queer Theory

Many regard Judith Butler as the inaugurator of this area of theoretical research and identify *Gender Trouble* as the innovative text which nurtured the nascent tenet of queer theory. However, many of her ideas have their roots in the work of Michel Foucault.

Whilst Butler wrote about politics creating 'the subject', initially when writing about feminist politics, this contention is equally applicable to any minority group in society. Butler (1999:5) argues that 'juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not "show" once the juridical structure of politics has been established...the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims.' She goes on to explore the notion that women fought for emancipation, for fair and equal representation in both language and politics, against the power which produced and restrained them, this certainly is also true for homosexual men. The category of homosexual was created and labelled by those in power, negative connotations became embedded in language with anything pertaining to this classification, and it is within these structures of power that these men have fought for equal rights. This idea of those in power having complete control is very much at one with those of Foucault.

If, as Foucault suggests, power is manifested in the repression of those without power, then queer theory is well placed to consider the minority group of gay men, being oppressed by the majority who are heterosexual. 'The place of queer peoples is connected to the place of other oppressed minorities and to the West's history of domination' (Kirsch 2000:57). Foucault (1980:90) believed that power

> is not primarily the maintenance and repression of economic relations, but is above all the relation of force... power is essentially that which represses. Power represses nature, the instincts, a class, individuals ... so should not the analysis of power be first and foremost the analysis of repression?

Gender Divisions

Whilst the classification of sexuality is an issue for queer theorists, so too is the demarcation of gender. Butler (1990:10) posits the idea that

> the presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as

> easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.

This raises many issues for queer theorists, because Butler suggests that the categorisation of 'queer' is far from straightforward. By suggesting these variations on accepted presumptions, she is opening up the whole area of queer theory to debate. Kirsch (2000:57) also takes up this issue and suggests that 'gender is a divisive force within gay politics, splitting groups into male and female, bisexual and queer. Like the past movements that queer theory eschews, each constituent meta-identity protests that their specific interests have not been adequately recognized.' Thus the categories of gender, sex and sexuality are so varied and the subsections so inexhaustible that an umbrella term seems virtually impossible.

Another issue raised by Butler is whether those people currently marginalised by the societal constructions placed upon them, should attempt to become assimilated into this restrictive and judgemental society. That they are rejected and given a diminished status by this system, may suggest that any assimilation is bound to be a painful and retrograde step. Butler (1990:9) questions how 'stability and coherence' can be achieved 'in the context of the heterosexual matrix'. She develops this further, using ideas drawn from Foucault's work. She points out that Foucault believed that juridical systems of power actually produce the subjects which they subsequently come to represent. Butler (1990:4) maintains that

> Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms – that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined and reproduced in accordance with the requirement of those structures.

Having given consideration to the difficulties inherent in the study of queer theory and the parameters within which these theorists work, I now turn to my own

subjects and explain why I invited these particular gay men to take part in my study. The following chapter outlines the rationale behind my choice of participants and what I hoped to achieve by this study. In addition, I give a brief synopsis of the background of these men and place them in their social and time bound context.

Chapter 4

The Subjects

'My history'! You would think I was Thucydides, wouldn't you? And if truth were told I'm so disorganised I'm barely able to get all this stuff into chronological order, not to talk of making sense of it. But if I'm to write about the life and times of Hugh O'Neill, the co-operation of the man himself would be a help, wouldn't it?

Brian Friel, *Making History*
Act 1 sc i

Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the five subjects whom I interviewed for my research and briefly describe their backgrounds. Further, I give reasons why I invited these men to be part of my study. In order to do this effectively, a short explanation of what information I hoped to gather is provided, which lends support to my choices. In this chapter, importantly, I acknowledge that these were conscious decisions and the subjects were selected carefully, in order to sample from several different eras. The timing of legislation was an important factor when choosing my subjects as I wanted to explore the differing experiences and contexts, influenced by the changing laws.

The Participants in Context

My study is of the experiences of gay men, primarily within the education system, but also within the subsequent world of work. I wanted a retrospective view of their educational experiences and to discover how those experiences had impacted on their future careers. The gay men who participated in my research were born into five consecutive decades, thus giving me a wide range of experiences to explore, and all potentially impacted on by different socio-political and cultural climates. I decided initially, to limit my sample to five men. Further, I needed to establish just how much data I was going to collect and to ensure that this would be a manageable amount to analyse, given the constraints of my study. According to Erben (1998:5) the size of the sample is immaterial, it is far more important 'that the consciously chosen sample must correspond to the overall aims of the study'. I believe I have done this through my choice of participants.

I recognise that my research could be critiqued for androcentricity, however, in this study I believe it is a legitimate choice. I decided to restrict my study to that of white gay men because I believe that lesbian women have equal, but different, stories to tell and, as such, would be worthy of a separate study. All my subjects are white because I believe that black gay men may have very different experiences, not only because of the colour of their skin but perhaps also because of their cultural background, and as such, would be the subject of a separate study.

Given that I wanted a wide range of age groups, specifically because of the social context in which these men were born and educated, I had to bear in mind the laws which were in operation at the time; Section 28 being one of the most

influential and the legalisation pertaining to homosexuality being another (see The Timeline for Gay Legislation and Milestones, Appendix 1). It is, perhaps, a common perception that contemporary society is more accepting of homosexuality than previous generations and I therefore sought a range of age groups in order to investigate this belief. In addition, I wanted to explore their lives in different contexts.

Butler (1999:185) posits that 'when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity'. I felt that the range of ages within my subjects, across differing eras, might yield interesting and different data, and perhaps shed some light on this contention.

The Influence of Society on Sexuality

Social scientists who support the theory of Positivism believe that people react to their environment and are influenced by what is considered society's 'norm'. If this is the case then we might assume that people do not have complete autonomy to behave in the way they choose, but rather they behave in a way which is a reaction to the expectations of society and to the way in which they are treated within this society. Thus is can be construed as a cause and effect pattern of behaviour and this was something I hoped would become apparent from my study. According to Knight (2002:29) 'causes are created in narratives that are temporary after-the-event rationalizations of what has happened.' Analysing these events and making sense of them 'involves making webs of understanding and meaning, not about isolating causes' (Knight 2002:29).

Whilst homosexuality is considered by theorists such as Butler, de Beauvoir and Foucault, to be a construct of society, a factor which I have explored previously in chapters 2 and 3, the purpose of my study was to investigate how these gay men live within this assumed construct and how they cope. Arguing what their lives might be like if this construct were different, has little value. According to Knight (2002:24) 'there are no certainties, but only social constructs, so research becomes inquiry into the ways in which social constructs are formed, operate and are sustained, and for whose benefit and whose detriment.' This is pivotal to my study: how these men live within this constructed society. It was therefore necessary to study men who had been born into different eras and different social

situations, in accordance with the concept of time within biographical research. According to Erben (1998:13) 'a life that is studied is the study of a life in time.' Thus I anticipated generating differing data from my subjects according to their age.

The Subjects

Dan, the youngest of my subjects, was 24 years old when the interview took place. He lives in Hampshire, but was born and brought up in the outskirts of London. His educational experiences at school were negative and he left at 16 and went directly into employment, rather than further education. He has had a variety of jobs, none of which required specific qualifications and he has run his own business. However, he has now returned to education and is training to be a Counsellor. He lives with the second subject of this study, Ben.

Ben was aged 37 years when the interview was held. He was born in Yorkshire, had good educational experiences, both at school and at college, which continued when he went to university in Wales. He began his working career as a Graphic Designer and eventually became a teacher in Hampshire. However, he had very negative experiences in education as a teacher and ultimately left teaching, although he now works within education, but not in a teaching capacity.

David, the third subject in chronological order, was 47 at the time of the interview. He was born and brought up in Oxford where his school experiences were so negative that he was spurred on to study harder in order to alleviate this disapproving and judgmental environment. He later moved to Cardiff to study at drama school. Several years later, he went to university and then became a teacher. He carried on with his education by studying at postgraduate level and is, at present, completing a PhD. He continues to teach and lives with the fourth subject of my study, John, with whom he has recently entered into a Civil Partnership.

John was 57 when interviewed. He has lived in Hampshire all his life. He left school at 16, choosing not to further his academic education but to train as a hairdresser. He went on to set up his own hairdressing business which he later sold, although he continues to work there as an employee. His education has continued throughout his career, by attending various training courses.

The last participant in this study, Alan, has recently celebrated his 70th birthday. He was born in Manchester and was educated in a public boarding

school. His educational experiences were very happy. When he left school, he moved to London to become an actor. During that part of his working life, he travelled extensively but had permanent bases in Sussex and London. He later went to what he called a Teacher Training School and taught for several years. He is now retired, living in Hampshire, but retains a second home in Sussex.

Why these Men?

As previously stated, my study necessitated interviewing gay men of varying ages. I wanted to explore their educational experiences, and as can be seen above, there are some similarities and differences immediately apparent. All remained at school until at least 16 and some even later, despite differing experiences within the educational environment. Some went on to college and university whilst others continued training and education at differing stages of their lives. All five have been successfully and gainfully employed throughout their working lives. The measure of success in employment is difficult to quantify, but for my purposes it means making a comfortable living without long periods of unemployment. All own their own homes, which again suggests a measure of financial success.

Robinson comments that 'the starting point of a critical project is the frustration or unhappiness of a group of people' (1996:1071 cited in Knight 2002:34). Whilst the subjects of my research would seem outwardly successful and content, they each have a story to tell of unhappiness and frustration linked to their sexual identity. One of the advantages of participating in a study such as this is that it can be cathartic to relate a life story.

Similar to the aims of feminist researchers, who wanted to 'make sure women's voices were heard', and who believed that 'articulating the experiences of women was central to bringing about social change and emancipating women from their condition of subordination' (Knight 2002:35), this study aims in some way to do the same for gay men. In many ways, their situation can be seen to mirror those of the subjects of the feminist researchers. They often live part of their lives in secrecy, afraid to air their views and in positions of subordination, marginalisation and fear, because of their sexuality. This study highlights these inequalities and illustrates their frustration, exclusion and, on occasions, unhappiness.

In this chapter I have explained the ideas I had when I commenced this study. I earlier outlined my purpose and some of the reasons for this research. In addition I have clarified specifically the criteria for choosing my five subjects and explained how each of these men fulfilled the criteria. In Appendix 1, I show where these men fit on the time line of notable events and legislation appertaining to homosexuality and illustrate the spread of their experiences. I later use this information in my data analysis to establish the effect it may have had on their lives.

It is to a consideration of how I collected the data for this study that I now turn.

Chapter 5

Collecting Data

'If you're asking me will my story be as accurate as possible – of course it will. But are truth and falsity the proper criteria? I don't know. Maybe when the time comes my first responsibility will be to tell the best possible narrative. Isn't that what history is, a kind of story-telling?'

Brian Friel, *Making History*
Act 1 sc i

Introduction

In the previous chapter I outlined the considerations which went into choosing my subjects and the information I hoped to glean. In this chapter, I discuss the method of research and explain the ethical considerations and how these impacted on the process of data collection.

Defining research

Research is a systematic investigation in order to make sense of the world, indeed some would define research as the pursuit of truth. Therein lays the rub: whose truth? Whilst collecting my data, like Toolan (1988:4) I recognised that narratives always contain 'a degree of artificial fabrication or constructedness not usually apparent in spontaneous conversation.' Further, I acknowledge that it may be virtually impossible to discover the quintessence of truth. Truth for the researcher may not be the same as the truth of the subject. However, as Roberts (2002:106) suggests, biographical researchers are 'not merely interested in "facts", but in the respondent's perception of what is "true".' Their "truth" is a constituent part of the narrative.

For this study, indeed, for any study, it is essential to decide what information is required for the given purpose. The task then is to decide how best to glean this information.

My research, into the lives and experiences of gay men, has to be a study of lives in time. A life cannot be studied independently and Roberts (2002:102) contends that it is pivotal to analyse 'the individual's account within a general socio-cultural context.' Roberts (2002:107) rebuts the criticism that an individual cannot be said to represent an historical process and suggests that this can be overcome by 'placing a story (as a whole or in part) within a collection of others as part of wider historical interpretation of a group'. This is what I have attempted to do with both my choice of five subjects and the method I have used to collect the data.

Hermeneutics is a way of interpreting the personal narrative in direct relation to the context of the society in which it occurs and in which the subjects lived. This form of investigation enables the researcher to gain insight into that society, as well as the life of the narrator.

The data must necessarily be collected as part of a narrative, an oral history, as data alone, without its context, will have no meaning. It is this interplay between context and narrative which is vital: one cannot be analysed without the other, otherwise the findings will be one dimensional and give an inaccurate account.

Biographical research, given its qualitative nature, is more appropriate for this topic than a method which would yield quantitative data. According to Knight (2002:27)

> researchers who are interested in explanations, understanding meanings or exploring feelings will use far less structured methods which are variously referred to as qualitative, interpretive, *verstehen* (to do with understanding, especially empathic understanding), illuminative, ethnographic or hermeneutic.

That is not to say that other methods are not equally valid, but rather that researching lives brings forth a plethora of data which will not necessarily fit into the specific categories necessary for quantitative analysis. One criticism levelled against biographical research is this lack of structure and, drawing on Bryman (1988:61–8) Roberts (2002:3) suggests some of the features of biographical research are 'a strategy which is relatively open and unstructured' and a rejection of 'the formulation of theories and concepts in advance' of field work which may 'impose a potentially alien framework' on subjects. I considered this when designing my own interview questions. I did not want to lead my interviewees, although I wanted a loose structure to the interviews to enable them to have some common focus. I also endeavoured to conduct the interviews without any pre-conceptions of what I expected to discover. However, as I was surprised by some of my findings, it was evident that I had been unable to do this entirely.

Biographical research gives the participants a voice, which may throughout their lives, have been denied them. Roberts (2002:99) posits that 'interviews from the "unheard"... enable them to give their historical perspective.' Such a process can be cathartic. Indeed, in an anonymous study, participants can voice their feelings and experiences without threat of retribution or consequences, thus they can articulate as perhaps, never before. An outcome of such biographical research is that the participants, and those who may belong to the marginal group,

are able to read of other similar experiences and know that they are not alone. Clarke's (1998:67) research makes these same claims and she describes the reactions of her own participants in her study. 'For those who are isolated and feeling "in a world of one" it provides them with a link to and a solidarity with others, insofar as they are able to see that they are not alone.'

Research methods which lend themselves to quantitative results, cannot detail such intimate and emotional features, thus losing much of the human aspect of the data. Quantitative data cannot capture feelings, emotions and even nuances of the subjects' stories in the same ways as some qualitative research and, as this is pivotal to my research, I chose to employ in-depth interviews in order to allow me access to my participants' lives.

The Place of the Researcher in the Research

Toolan (1988:4) notes that 'narratives have to have a teller, and that teller, no matter how backgrounded or remote or "invisible" is always important. The researcher clearly has a part to play in the recording of data, but also in generating that data'. As Roberts (2002:94) suggests, direct personal contact is a feature of biographical research and even if the interviewer just nods, there is a relationship. The resultant interpretation may necessarily be subjective. The researcher will bring their own values and experiences with them to the whole process. According to Kirby and McKenna (cited in Denzin 1989:46)

> Who you are has a central place in the research process because you bring your own thoughts, aspirations and feelings, and your own ethnicity, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, occupation, family background, schooling, etc. to your research.

Knight's (2002:30) statement reinforces this idea, he said

> humans can never be objective in the same way that a thermometer is objective; such objectivity that can be attained is always objectivity *within* a culture, for it is almost impossible for researchers to shed their identities as people who have biographies and are in a time and a place.

This idea is reinforced by the work of Thompson (cited in Roberts 2002:99) when he suggests that 'every life story inextricably intertwines both objective and subjective evidence – of different, but equal value.'

In biographical research it is virtually impossible to be objective and impartial, particularly as the researcher will necessarily have a vested interest in the topic, so whose truth will be recorded? Knight observes that anyone undertaking research has a desire to change some aspect of society, or to highlight a certain area of interest, and therefore cannot be completely objective. He states that the aim of the researcher 'is to change the world through research – by deconstructing it or by trying to make it fairer. Objectivity is incompatible with this mission' (Knight 2002:34). This must surely be the case when a researcher will necessarily have a vested interest in the topic chosen. In my study, I have attempted to be objective, but realise that this is virtually impossible, given my own interest in the topic. Indeed, the very nature of research suggests that the researcher must have an avid interest in the topic even before embarking upon the study.

Yow (1994:177) argues that researchers 'should make apparent their own motivations and interests and make clear their own social background and experiences so as to make their own strategies and biases visible.' I have done this in my introduction, making clear my own position in the study.

Another consideration when carrying out research, is choosing appropriate participants for the study, and being aware of the relationship between researcher and subject. I had a close relationship with some of my subjects. Knight (2002:34) maintains that 'if investigators are really to learn about the world as it is to their informants then they need to build a rapport with them as individuals.' I recruited participants through my own circle of friends: three of whom were friends of mine and two who were friends of those friends. Whilst I was aware that friends might feel inhibited when being interviewed by me, I considered that a complete stranger may also have felt awkward when responding. In the event, as far as I can ascertain, there were no obvious differences in the data collected. There seemed to be no awkwardness or inhibitions in relating sensitive and personal material to me. This was shown when some material was divulged to me prior to the actual interview, to place the subsequent information in context. The subject did not want this information used in the research. Similarly, there seemed to be no constraints

between the two sets of partners in re-telling the stories of difficult periods of their lives. It appeared that they had very trusting and open relationships. This openness with me may perhaps have been the result of the confidentiality agreement made beforehand, (see Appendix 2), the use of pseudonyms, or the promise that the findings would only be used in academic documents associated with the research.

With the plethora of research methods and the on-going debates of the validity of these methods, it was necessary to be clear about what I hoped to achieve through research in order to ensure I selected the most appropriate method of data collection. I chose the semi-structured, in depth interview, which seemed to be the most suitable method of data collection to elicit the personal and sensitive information I sought for my research. There is some suggestion that oral narratives are not as reliable as written. This may be the case, as written life stories are permanent whereas oral histories are immediate and may have been repeated several times. They can change with each telling and also be constructed in response to new influences.

Ethical Considerations

Before beginning my interviews, I was sensitive to the ethical considerations of such an undertaking. I approached my participants beforehand and explained the basis of my research. I drafted a letter ensuring confidentiality and privacy, which they, and I, duly signed (see Appendix 2). I asked the participants' permission to record the interview, and all readily agreed. I then typed up the transcript verbatim and sent them a copy to edit. I wanted to check the accuracy of the transcript and also ensure that they were happy with the representation. I indicated that I would then re-type the transcript with any alterations which had been requested. I informed them that I would not proceed with the data analysis until the participants were satisfied that the transcript was an accurate representation of the interview. I explained to them that I would give them pseudonyms. The only changes which were requested were those where other people were mentioned. I therefore changed all transcripts, giving pseudonyms to not only the participants, but to those people about whom they spoke. I also made clear that, with their permission, I might use direct quotes from the transcript in an

associated piece of work I was planning. However, I retained the right to report my work and use it for my final thesis.

Interviews

According to May (2001:142) 'Interviews are used as a resource for understanding how individuals make sense of their social world and act within it.' This method of research can uncover much about the interviewees including their feelings, beliefs, aspirations, and experiences. In practical terms, any biographical research is going to be revisionist in nature. Interviews carried out will be a life story told in retrospect, with incidents both left in and omitted, explanations made: facts will have percolated through time and taken on a new significance. Erben (1998:5) states that, 'the collection of contemporary biographical data through interview is one that is especially useful to educational and other social science researchers.' It also allows more probing to particular questions, perhaps eliciting more depth of information. According to Miller and Glassner (cited in May 2001:127)

> those of us who aim to understand and document others' understandings choose qualitative interviewing because it provides us with a means for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality.

A study which is focussed and uses open ended interviews, can be illuminating, but obviously is not without its limitations. Any type of research, no matter what methods used, is going to be restricted in some way. However, interviews can be effective and enlightening and have the advantage of allowing participants to discuss issues within their own frame of reference. As Erben (1998:9) points out, 'The interview text is of particular interest to the biographical researcher because it is a specific kind of evidence. In itself it is an objectification of the subject, but has its roots in the life of the subject and it illuminates the life of the subject.'

The interviewees in an open ended study are guided only inasmuch as there is a focus of four or five questions, or prompts, which are universal for all interviewees, thus giving some consistency. In my research, I composed five

questions (see Appendix 3) which were used as a framework and a springboard for discussion, but the participants were then free to tell their life stories in their own way. My intention was to allow for individual and varying narratives, including personal anecdotes, to illuminate the point being made.

The first question, 'When were you first aware of your sexuality?' could be construed as quite generic for both heterosexual and homosexual interviewees, but I wanted to establish whether there was a common period in the lives of the interviewees when sexuality became apparent. The second and third questions were generated specifically for my gay participants following an experience I had at the NUT (LGBT) Conference in London in February 2006. Whilst participating in a workshop on homophobia, I was the only heterosexual delegate in the room. When the questions 'At what age did you become aware that you were gay?' and 'At what age did you tell a friend about your sexuality?' were asked, everyone in the room could remember specifically when they had realised they were gay and in whom they first confided. I was unable to answer the questions, and it struck me that one of the main differences between the experience of gay and heterosexual people, is that the initial awareness, and the lead up to coming out, is often an all consuming consideration for gay people, but is not even a factor for heterosexuals. The interview questions were, in the main, chronological in sequence, which also gave some structure to the narrative.

Structure, or the arranging of events into a shape or sequence, can also affect the analysis of a narrative and with this in mind, I have used quotes throughout from a play by Brian Friel called 'Making History'. In this play, he highlights many of the difficulties and considerations contingent with the recording of history, or even histories. Indeed, Roberts (2002:109) likens the gathering of data from the narratives and the interpretation of this data by the researcher as 'the making of "history" by the respondent and the researcher' and it is this collaboration which is pivotal to my study.

I was concerned that the questions posed may have led my subjects along a narrative path which I was suggesting, thereby ignoring the potential narrative path they may have chosen to follow. As Yow (1994:4) suggests when describing the process of documenting life stories, 'there is someone else involved who inspires the narrator to begin the act of remembering, jogs memory, and records and presents the narrator's words.' Thus, while recognising I was, to a certain

extent, the catalyst, I attempted to place a limitation on my direct involvement. I wanted some generic focus and, by limiting the number of questions posed, I hoped that the subjects would still be able to maintain a level of autonomy in terms of what they wanted to reveal. For each of the participants, different importance might be placed on events in the past, perhaps because of their different experiences, both then and as a consequence to that event.

I attempted to remain silent as far as possible throughout the interviews, although, in reality, this was virtually impossible given that at times I needed to clarify a point and at other times, I encouraged the participant to continue with a certain train of thought. Whilst I felt that this might be influencing the interview, I was encouraged by Knight (2002:50) who suggests a positive outcome of interviewer input, in that 'face to face work offers the chance to change the direction of a whole inquiry to accommodate new insights, comments made by participants, prompts or patter that turn out to work well. They can also jettison things that aren't working.' Thus Knight (2002:55) views such interjection as a positive action. However, he goes on to caution that, 'good listening is something that takes effort and practice. One part of it is not talking'. Oleson (cited in Roberts 2002:108) also suggests that the 'impact on the researcher of other people's stories reveals the research process as a complex insider-outsider relationship'.

I attempted to collect data about a particular aspect and time scale of the subjects' lives, while at the same time leaving it open for them to add information which they deemed important. Thereby hangs another problem with this method of research. The subjects themselves, in the telling of their stories, edit the information and choose what they believe to be relevant and important. Memory is an important factor in the representation of the data, questioning the accuracy of recall, as is the revisionist view of past events. According to Denzin (1997:25)

> The dividing line between fact and fiction thus becomes blurred in the autobiographical and biographical text, for if an author can make up facts about his or her life, who is to know what is true and what is false? The point is, however, as Sartre notes, that if an author thinks something existed and believes in its existence, its effects are real. Since all writing is fictional, made up out of

> things that could have happened or did happen, it is necessary to do away with the distinction between fact and fiction.

Ultimately, it is the participants' stories and it is their truth.

Whilst the resultant information may be difficult to analyse and compare with other data collected, it can generate unknown and unimagined data, purely because of the free nature of the discourse. According to Knight (2002:187)

> Building an interpretation from the data up, rather than reading the data to test interpretations or findings, is frequently referred to as building grounded theory... It is an extremely attractive approach to interpretive researchers whose intellectual position is that realities are socially constructed fluxes that have features which are person and context specific.

Such building up can be a useful tool in this type of study and can provide a greater understanding of the subject's point of view. It can highlight a shared experience of which the interviewer was previously unaware. Further, it can also elicit common experience which the interviewees may have shared, thus giving a focus to the eventual analysis.

The Language in Transcription

Language, our main form of communication, has prime importance in any research. In my study, initial consideration was given to how we perceive sexuality. Butler (1999:31) maintains that gender norms are linguistically constructed and mediated thus our perceptions are initially instigated by language.

The imprecision of language is an important consideration for any researcher, but this is particularly important when conducting interviews and transcribing the narrative. The story told is not necessarily the same as the story heard and the recording of it can be a minefield of possible inaccuracies and misrepresentations. Verisimilitude – the ability to accurately reproduce the authentic – is virtually impossible, however, the audience may be able to experience the life vicariously, according to the verisimilitude of the text. '...the reader comes to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced them' (Stake 1994:240 as quoted in Denzin 1997:10).

Paralinguistic features also add another dimension to the communication. Fillers, pauses, false starts, repetition and so on, heighten the researcher's sensitivity to what the interviewee is saying and how they feel about saying it. Whilst some researchers feel the need to exclude these from their interviews, and 'try to eliminate all human variations out of the proceedings' (Knight 2002:49) I duly noted these features in the transcript and have used this information in the final analysis. Using interviews for research means that the interviewer can be far more sensitive to personal nuances than in a questionnaire or other quantitative forms of data collection. However, the down side is that the researcher may read more into these paralinguistic features than was actually meant.

Another issue with the language of interviews is the sex of interviewer and interviewee. It is difficult to establish whether words, especially value laden words, have the same meaning to both men and women. Research carried out by the likes of Dale Spender (1980) and Robin Lakoff (1975) show that there are vast differences between the language of men and women. Spender (1980:58) suggests that because men have created language from their historical position of superiority in a patriarchal society, then they

> have not supplied meanings which undermine their power, diminish their prestige, or detract from their image... they have formulated a semantic rule which posits themselves as central and positive, as the norm, and they have classified the world from that reference point, constructing a symbolic system which represents patriarchal order.

Spender suggests that women's position of inferiority or even invisibility, is reinforced within the man-made language. If this is the case, then so, too, are homosexual men excluded and demeaned by their exclusion from this language. They too, are 'the product of one sex's view of the world' (Spender 1980:59). Spender (1980:16) draws on research by Muriel Schultz and notes that 'it was not mere coincidence that there were more positive words for males in the language, nor was it an accident that there were so many negative words for females with no semantic equivalent for males.' Whilst Spender refers specifically to negative connotations for females within language, I think this is true also of homosexual

men. They are not in the position of power assigned to heterosexual males and as such, suffer the inferiority within language consigned to women.

Adrienne Rich (1980:204) also suggests that 'in a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence.' Thus, language is crucial, but silence also has a part to play.

Given my sex, I considered whether that would jeopardise the accuracy of my analysis. Accordingly, I sought to analyse my own language and participation within the interview scenario as part of my data analysis.

In this chapter I have outlined the variety of considerations which went into designing my research and, in doing so, have explained my choice of method for collecting data. Further, I have explored how the accuracy of this may, in places, be open to question and ultimately difficult to analyse. Finally, I have explained some of my choices of topic for data analysis and in the next chapter I put this into practice.

Chapter 6

Telling Stories

'I don't believe that a period of history – a given space of time – my life – your life – that it contains within it one 'true' interpretation just waiting to be mined. But I do believe that it may contain within it several possible narratives...And those ways are determined by the needs and the demands and the expectations of different people and different eras.'

Brian Friel, *Making History*
Act 2, sc ii

Considerations for Analysis

Biographical research is a minefield of potential interpretations and possible inaccuracies. From the outset, choosing a topic, choosing subjects, selecting a data collection method and then recording it, are all areas fraught with potentially influential decisions. According to Erben (1998:12) 'Biographical research data do not claim, or seek the impossibility of the exact replication of a life, the requirement is that the researcher refer to lives in such a way as to illuminate them in relation to a research objective.' Indeed, Denzin (1997:38) suggests that this might be the experience for the subject of biographical research. 'In speaking, I hear myself being created. I hear myself, not as the other hears me but as I want them to hear me. In this cracked acoustical mirror I hear the sound of my own thoughts, knowing that you will never hear me as I hear myself'. Thus for both researcher and participant, there is an awareness that the exact replication is an impossibility.

In this chapter, I represent the data from the five transcripts of the vivid, expressive biographies, told by each of the men in turn, as accurately as possible, using direct quotes, and I describe the reactions as they recall past events in their lives. Nevertheless, whilst attempting this level of accuracy, I draw on Griffin, (cited in Sparkes 1997:34) who describes her role as researcher and states that when re-telling stories told by her participants,

> I cannot avoid telling *my* story about their *lives*. I can use the voices of others from (my understanding of) their positions, but I can never speak/write *from* their positions. I cannot become them, I can only pass on certain aspects of (what they have shown me about) their lives.

Whilst I am aware of these limitations when recounting and analysing their stories, I attempt to represent their life stories. Then, according to the model suggested by Wengraff (2001:269) 'Having concluded the Biographical Data Analysis, you should summarise the themes or issues that you see as having arisen in the lived life of the subject as analysed through the Biographic Data Analysis,' and I do this in the next chapter.

Whilst I acknowledge my own influence on the collecting, recording and presentation of the findings of this study, it is also pertinent to note that the

readings of this thesis will be different, depending on the audience. Denzin (1997:26) suggests that,

> When a writer writes a biography, he or she writes him/herself into the life of the subject written about. When the reader reads a biographical text, that text is read through the life of the reader. Hence, writers and readers conspire to create the lives they write and read about. Along the way, the produced text is cluttered by the traces of the life of the real person being written about.

Given these limitations, I present each of the stories told, in no particular order of priority.

Alan

Alan is a gregarious, 70 year old ex actor who was born in the era when homosexuality was illegal. He begins his story with the statement that homosexuality was 'against the law' and 'things were very different' then. He explains that 'in the fifties there was a very thriving gay scene everywhere every, every provincial town of any size had usually two gay pubs, two gay bars one would be an upper class bar like a hotel bar the other would be a rough bar.' So although homosexuality was illegal, the picture he paints is very different from that which might be imagined for that time. However, he did point out that 'police raided clubs, but they did it as a formality they were never, never em sort of unpleasant at all.' This is at variance with the idea of a subculture of hidden sexual activities which might be presumed in a time when homosexuality was illegal.

Gergen and Gergen (cited in Roberts 2002:124) suggest that 'the successful narrative is one that orders events as they relate to the attainment of a particular "goal state"'. In this interview, Alan structures his narrative around his working life, which is linked to either people in the acting fraternity or to plays and productions in which he was involved. His memory for names, dates and places is phenomenal and this is the framework on which his story is built. What is also interesting to note and which is unusual, is that much of his story is told using reported direct speech. The people who have been important to him are brought

to life through remembered (whether accurate or inaccurate) conversations, repeated verbatim. They seem to take on a greater significance than his own memories of the events. Whether this is because their reactions to him are of primary importance to his own self identification, or whether it is a result of a lifetime spent using dialogue as a tool of his trade, is unclear, but it provides an interesting perspective on the narrative. The memories of his contribution to the conversations are not as clear or as detailed as those of his acquaintances and friends. For example he relates a story of a row in the theatre when he was furious at a perceived insult. He recalls that the production manager said, referring to his anger, 'You have every right to be and we must investigate this.' Later he recalls that the person involved in the incident later bumped into him and said, 'Ooh Alan, how wonderful to see you after all this time. I did miss you when you went.' However, there is no mention of his own involvement in the conversations or indeed, any input at all.

When recalling his life in the theatre and describing how many of his actor friends were gay, he suggests that there was a common perception that 'if you were gay it would show on stage, there would just be something that would show it, but that was never the case with me.' The implication being that sexuality is a visible thing, a method of identification and, I felt suggested by Alan, something to hide if you are gay. This observation was also prevalent in the other interviews. He goes on to explain, 'I think if you're not too comfortable with your own character, to play roles can be very satisfying and going on stage where people see you as another character apart from yourself is quite exciting.' I got a sense here of Alan not being comfortable within himself and wishing to present another façade to society.

Throughout the narrative, issues of loneliness and a feeling of exclusion recur. He explains that many gay men during his era 'felt out of society and [were] not accepted' although he does not elaborate the point further. Alan reveals that for him, the 'worst thing about being gay was this sense of loneliness and isolation to some extent which I've always had.' Frequently he talks about 'feeling vulnerable, not having a family, having nobody', and states 'I don't feel in myself a part of mainstream society', and further, he admits that 'I somehow do not still do not feel I fit in.' His hesitant repetition of 'do not', seems to illustrate strong feelings and suggests just how much this perceived exclusion has affected him.

Conversely, he recalls that when he was a pupil in an all boys, public school, he felt a sense of inclusion. Being gay, or even putting a name to his sexuality was not an issue. He said, 'One tended not to think of it like that. We were all pupils and because it was all boys we were up to all sorts of things.' He admits to 'living a gay lifestyle at a fairly early age' and delighting in this sense of belonging. During this period of his life he 'didn't feel different from anyone.' However, he explains that later, he 'tried to have...some feelings towards girls' but admits that 'with men I felt more comfortable and at ease.' This was a period when he tried to conform to what he perceived as the normal lifestyle, but this resulted in confusion and he admitted that, 'I'm a bit of an enigma to myself.' He also revealed that for many of these boys, it was an 'adolescent period that they grew out of...[but] others didn't.' The implication being that it was a phase, a transitional period, for some of the boys, but others remained homosexual.

He links his feelings of alienation with the anxiety and depression which resulted from this marginalisation. Throughout his story he tells of periods of anxiety and depression, sometimes as a direct result of a tragedy, such as the death of his mother. He confided, 'I do get a bit depressed at times it's a mixture of depression and anxiety'. However, he also acknowledges that these feelings of anxiety occur at other times and remarked: 'I just have a sort of anxiety a sense of anxiety when I'm on my own for very long periods.' This anxiety has led to bouts of instability and drinking. When working in the theatre he admits, 'I was beginning to get a little bit unstable, I was drinking rather heavily...I had one or two unfortunate incidents (pause)'. These incidents were associated with unsuccessful homosexual relationships which ended badly, thus reinforcing his sense of loneliness and the pivotal importance placed on his inability to bond with a partner. Whilst many people have unsuccessful relationships throughout their lives, there is a sense here that Alan believes these failures are directly related to being gay. He explains, 'I was just drinking, getting drunk...and there is, if you are gay and you're young...this in.. psychological instability.' This instability may not have anything to do with sexuality, but Alan believes it to be the case and clearly it has affected him deeply. In his narrative there is a hesitancy when articulating the word 'instability' as if he is reluctant to put a name to it.

He links these feelings with the lack of a stable relationship and reveals that all his close friends are in "meaningful" homosexual partnerships. It is interesting

to note that none of the friends he mentioned during the interview were heterosexual couples. He says 'this is where I feel, almost I get depressed because of the anxiety, anxiety and depression mixed because nearly all my close friends they're all coupled up and out of my circle, I'm the only...one who isn't .' Alan expresses a desire to have a closer relationship with someone special, 'As I get older and more vulnerable I would very much like to have a partner and I don't.'

He has one very close relationship about which he speaks with great fondness. He is hesitant to call it a relationship and changes the lexis to friendship, perhaps differentiating between the physical and the platonic. However, it has had a powerful impact on his life for several years. He explains that this friend 'was Greek and we formed a very, very close rela.. well I suppose friendship, I call it a relationship because there is this thing called Uranian love which is a relationship, it's a mental thing, there is never any physical thing but it is this bonding.' Such explanations reflect exactly the misconception that homosexuality is always about sex. It is not the case. It can be an emotional feeling, an attraction, a friendship and a bonding, but it is not necessarily sexual. The strength of his feelings are shown when he describes that he misses 'that company terribly' and several times he states that he misses him in that section of the interview.

In much of his story, Alan refers to the 'fraternity' to which he belonged in the gay community. He recalls it was like a 'brotherhood' with a sense of 'closeness' between the members. 'Age didn't matter...it was just the fact that you were pleased to meet somebody else that was gay.' Alan often uses the collective noun 'gays' when referring to his friends and his marginalised community. He explains, 'I'm perhaps a little bit different from a lot of gays because they go searching for a partner...'. Running through his account is a very strong feeling that he believes there is a division in society between 'straight' and gay people, and that he is very firmly ensconced in the latter group.

When speaking about his mother, to whom he was very close before her death, he still refers to her in the present tense. 'I love my mother very much and I would love her to have had grandchildren.' There is an overwhelming sense of loss and regret in his account of her passing. He acknowledges that 'she was brilliant the worst thing that has ever happened to me in my life was definitely the death of my mother (pause)'. It was evident here that there was emotion in the pauses and fillers in his speech. He returns to his mother frequently throughout his

narrative, illustrating just what an influence she was on his life and what an impact her death had. Again, he links this with his sense of isolation, lacking a family or partner to share his grief. After describing her illness just prior to her death, he describes how he 'came down one morning and there she was just lying there I had to call the doctor, call the undertaker [and] had to do all the business and that was where I could have done with a family.'

The subject of his homosexuality was never discussed with his mother, but he believes that she was aware that he was gay. 'I never came out as such, I never said I am gay but I brought my friends back home and it was never really mentioned. She once brought me a book called *The Follies of Oscar Wilde* and in that it was a sort of saying "I know" so it was not mentioned but accepted.' Yet, Alan was unable to share this significant part of his life with the person who was most important to him. Interestingly, 'accepted' has connotations of being tolerated, but nonetheless it seems to go no further than that. He also recalls that his father's reaction was similar. 'I just think, rather like my mother, that he accepted and nothing was ever said.' Their reluctance or inability to discuss Alan's sexual orientation suggests a barrier between them, reinforcing the idea that homosexuality was something to be ashamed of or secretive about.

In his story, Alan reflects upon the possibility of his mother's influence on his sexuality. At several points, he tries to identify why he is gay. It is interesting that he seems to consider there may be a seat for his sexuality which would not necessarily be a consideration for a heterosexual person and this also seems to suggest that being gay is not natural. 'That's another thing I think about gays, perhaps, I don't know whether you would agree, there is very often a rather dominant mother figure and very often if parents divorce or split and the boy stays with the mother, that is em sort of a push towards being gay.' He appears to feel, not that gayness is a choice, but rather it is determined through early life experiences. This links with Freud's Oedipus theory, where the mother is a strong influence on the child's sexuality, albeit inadvertently. Sedgwick (1991:249) also picks up on this point when writing about homosexual portrayal in 1950s and 1960s literature when she says 'its apparent high congruence with the homophobic insistence, popularized from Freudian sources with astonishing effect...in the fifties and sixties, that mothers are to be "blamed" for – always unknowingly – causing their sons' homosexuality'. Alan explains that he, 'felt that with most gay people I

know, the mother has been very strong in that person's life.' This is clearly a possibility to which he has given much thought, again suggesting that he has been searching for a "cause" for his sexuality. When his father was absent, during the war, between 1940 and 1945, he admits that he had 'an idyllic happy life as a child' living with his mother and two sisters. He thrived in this matriarchal environment but when his father returned, he recalls that 'he uprooted all of that he, he was very bad tempered...and everything started to go wrong, but, and so, and so that'. Here Alan's speech falters and the sentence is left unfinished, illustrating perhaps the strength of the sad memories about the interloper his father had become.

Alan cannot remember precise incidents of homophobic bullying or unpleasantness, but admits that 'if there were any unpleasant experiences I would remember them, unless you know the conscious shuts them out.' This selective memory may hide bullying incidents from his past. Alan acknowledges that 'a lot of my psychological problems later on when I was working in the theatre were due to negative gay experiences' (his emphasis) although he does not elucidate further about these experiences. It was not just from outside the gay community where Alan had bad experiences, but he also identifies that he thinks 'gays can be...very nasty', but again, he did not elaborate on this.

Whilst living at home with his mother, he recalls the reactions of the neighbours to his sexuality and recounts that 'the woman down below was heard saying to somebody else, "I think that Alan's a bit of a nancy boy" and they would call you queer but, but you just rode above it (pause) it wasn't very often, it wasn't often enough to worry about.' The pause in the narration and the repetition of 'often' suggests that this memory may be more painful than Alan wants to admit. Also, the suggestion that he 'rode above it' implies that there was an insult or slight, which needed to be addressed. He explains that he 'never had any experiences when I was attacked or anything like that,' perhaps suggesting that in his view homophobia is only problematical when it becomes physical.

Another story he tells is of being turned down for National Service because of his sexuality. He recalls this in a humorous way, when, after his physical examination he was asked outright if he was homosexual, to which he replied 'Yes'. Later, he received a letter saying 'you're classed as grade 4 and you will not be wanted'. Alan's perception of the reason for this was that 'you might contaminate the others you see.' He uses the word 'contaminate' in fun, but nevertheless it has

negative connotations of a disease, something which can be caught. The word was his choice, not that of the Army Recruitment office. This is another example of a slight to which he has had to reconcile himself. It reinforces the idea that his sexuality is distasteful, an illness and something of which to be ashamed.

Whilst teaching, he explains that he 'deflected' any queries about his sexuality with humour and banter. His sexuality was never a problem in that environment and he says for the first time in his narrative, 'I delighted in the fact that I was gay actually.' He continues 'I think if you are openly gay, it is rather like the press, if you're openly gay there's no story, there's nothing to talk about.'

He admits that he 'treated some gay people badly because I'd been tre...I felt I'd been treated badly', so whilst there are no examples of bullying in Alan's narrative, and he doesn't believe that he has been bullied, there are strong hints that he has experienced homophobic incidents throughout his life.

David

David was once an actor, who went on to become a teacher. At the time of the interview he was 47 years old. David was interviewed with his partner John and there is evidence in his language of mutual co-operation. He often reiterates something John has said, or reinforces that he has understood, or shared the experience. Often there are examples of overlap when they have both experienced similar occurrences. It is interesting to note the overlap of 'feeling different' when they were both speaking about first being aware of their sexuality.

David's story is structured around his education and employment. Education took on an important role for David as he saw it as a means of escape; primarily from the school environment where he could immerse himself in study and ignore the outside world and also as a means of making something of himself, of realising his ambitions.

When speaking about his emerging sexuality, David states, 'I had to suppress any feelings of attraction I felt for men...I went into denial.' From an early age he became aware that the feelings he had were something of which to be ashamed and kept hidden. He was terrified of these feelings and felt powerless to control them, even though he feared the consequences. 'I was starting to convince myself that maybe there was something the matter with me and if I didn't do

something about it then maybe I was going to be locked up or something.' He admits that, 'I was in fear of myself throughout my teenage years.' This feeling was exacerbated by his father's reactions. David describes how his father would speak of homosexuals 'through gritted teeth' and conveyed a feeling of anger 'towards the imaginary homosexual' about whom he was speaking. His father stated that they did not deserve to live per se. David chose the word 'vitriolic' when describing his father's speech. It is not surprising that he felt he had to hide his feelings at home when he knew what his parents' reactions might be. He also admits that because of the 'stigma and the shame I didn't want to acknowledge it to myself or to anybody else'.

David described in some detail how he was socialised from an early age into the stereotypical expectations of male behaviour. He explained that his father refused to allow him to play with dolls and how disdainful he was when he 'asked for a dolly'. The word 'disdainful' is an adult revisionist description of the incident, but the feeling must have been conveyed quite forcibly to the three year old child for him to remember it with such clarity. His father was 'opposed' to the idea of him learning the violin, not considering it a manly pursuit, and David also recalls that 'he didn't like the fact that I didn't like to play football'. From a very early age he was imbued with hetero-normative ideals of behaviour from his father who 'had very fixed notions of masculinity and that was how he wanted his son to behave'. No doubt this added to David's feelings of confusion when he did not conform.

David's memories are sometimes associated with his epiphany: when he realised that he was not alone in feeling as he did. He notes that the screening of the biographical film 'The Naked Civil Servant' in 1975, was hugely influential in his identification as homosexual. Quentin Crisp was a fairly unique character represented in this film and David identified with him. Thus his memory of being aware of being gay is linked to the 'flashbulb' memory. This type of memory is categorised by a person remembering exactly what they were doing when a particular event took place.

David's experience of coming out initially to a friend was a fairly positive one, although he admits that it could have been because this friend may have been gay too. 'I came out to my friend at home before anybody else...and he was curious and sort of excited because there was a repressed gay man...'. David appears to

have been able to recognise something in this friend which was comparable to his own feelings although he doesn't identify what that was.

Coming out in other situations has, for David, been more problematic. Indeed, he has found it difficult in the work environment to keep his private life confidential. He tells of being unable to join in conversations with other staff 'because I don't want to give away the fact that I live with a man'. When he decided to be open about his partner and to use the male pronoun 'he' when speaking about him, he reveals that some people reacted with 'tight lips' and tried to 'make it seem as if it's o.k. but it's not really'. He states that 'it's no problem, it's their problem' although because he shows an awareness of these reactions, it suggests that he is sensitive to the impact he is causing and therefore it is an issue for him to some degree. He also repeats that 'it is so oppressive, it is so oppressive to be surrounded by this staffroom of people talking about their partners of the opposite sex'. Again, this is a strong and emotive word to use for something which he insists is not his problem.

Coming out to his mother was not easy and he admits that he 'couldn't actually face saying to [her] well o.k. I'm homosexual.' Their relationship was not conducive to intimate conversations and he explains, 'we didn't talk about it most of the time we didn't talk about it we weren't that close.' Interestingly, he explains away his mother's lack of support, suggesting that she had adopted many of his father's ideas throughout their marriage and also because by then she was a widow, that it may have been more difficult for her. There is an obvious bond there and he seems to take the blame for putting her into a difficult position by wanting her acceptance of his sexuality rather than blaming her for her lack of support. This links with his earlier statements suggesting that there was something wrong with him because of his feelings and it was somehow his fault. He seems willing to bear the brunt of the "blame".

There is in his language a pent up anger, a bravado, but against what or whom is unclear. He relates moments of realisation in his life when he thinks 'Oh to hell with it, this is me, this is how I am, you can call me what you like but I'm going to achieve, I am going to achieve, I've got something, I'm going to achieve you know you're not going to drive me out.' This feeling is not related to a particular incident and it seems aimed at society in general and appears to be a protestation against a world which won't accept him because of his sexuality. This

is a feeling he has had for some time, although he doesn't tell of anything in particular which set it off. The challenge, 'Do what you like, I don't care' is not said to anyone in particular or about a specific incident and it is unclear what is being done to him. It is evident that he felt himself to be different, an outsider, and he shows surprise when he recognises 'that there were others out there like me'. Again, he doesn't clarify what he means by 'like me' nor how he was different.

David remembers being bullied at school. He recalls being constantly called names, and that 'everybody was telling me that I was gay or queer or poof...day in and day out.' This name calling was not restricted to school. The neighbours also spoke about him in a disparaging way which was reported to him by his mother. She told him, 'Sylvia up the road said that you've got a problem with David haven't you? I can tell that he's queer isn't he?' No mention is made about whether his mother stood up for him or retaliated in any way, yet he continues to make excuses, saying that she was 'trying to cope with it herself.' There is an overwhelming feeling in his narrative that everyone else had to be considered, to ensure that they were not upset or embarrassed by his sexuality. However, there is nothing in the account about how he felt, or about anyone considering his feelings. More recently he admitted that he received an unintentional slight when a colleague asked him, 'can you tell me why that lovely word gay has been debased?' He also recalls seeing 'banners in the London demonstrations [about Gay Rights] read something like "all gays should be shot".' Homophobia and heterosexism seems to surround him and he remains conscious that at one end of the scale he is an object of dislike and at the extreme end hated, purely because he is a member of a group identifying their sexual orientation and homosexual preference.

Such homophobia has also been much in evidence in his working environment. He reveals that it was fairly common for pupils to ask him if he were 'queer' and to actually using that word. He also recalls a particularly painful incident which he describes as 'viciously homophobic' and the perpetrators using 'nasty taboo language'. The incident was so painful for him that he admits to deliberating whether to mention it in the interview. He also returns to the incident several times and blames himself for not having taken action at the time. He questions, 'Why didn't I do anything abut it? There's this tremendous sense of injustice when I think back' although he admits that at that time, 'in the period of AIDS there was a tremendous stigma about being gay' and that he didn't want to

be 'hounded out of the job'. He berates himself that he 'didn't have the courage to do something about it'. As the victim, the choice of lexis 'courage' seems inappropriate. He asked himself 'What have I done to deserve that?' This constant use of questions suggests confusion and lack of understanding about why he is treated so badly. He is a good and kind man but this is not recognised under the dominant identification of being gay. This seems to be the overriding categorisation of him, without any consideration of what he is like as a person. Such categorisation can be linked to prejudice which is based on ignorance.

He also described the experiences of another gay colleague who had been 'hounded out of the classroom' and had pupils 'spitting at him'. This was a relatively recent occurrence, and as such, not in the era of the 'gay plague' hysteria of AIDS, which reinforces that homophobia is alive and thriving in contemporary society.

David admits to being lonely because of his sexuality and because 'it takes a long time for you to come to terms with it to be able to do anything physically about it'. He spent many lonely years before he took the decision to get out and try to meet other men with whom he had something in common. In order to meet other gay men, David recounts that he had to go to rather 'seedy' areas where gay clubs were located on 'the outskirts of the city', again reinforcing this sense of living life on the periphery, both literally and figuratively. He explains his first visit to a gay club was 'a bit cloak and dagger', suggesting something illicit involving subterfuge. The first visit, which was initiated by an advertisement in the *Gay Times* took on huge proportions. It was, for him, a terrifying experience which had to be undertaken alone because of the secrecy and alienation created by his homosexuality. He admits that it was 'just far too scary' but explains that his need for companionship 'just pushed me'. He describes his feelings when he thought to himself, 'hold on I can't hang around any longer I've just got to.'

David admits 'I am reconciled to the fact that throughout your life people won't accept you, won't like you and I suppose for throughout my life I have been trying, been trying to get people to like me but always realise there will be some...'. His sentence trails off at this point, perhaps revealing the extent of the pain this realisation has caused. The repetition of 'been trying' may also suggest that David is searching for the right words to convey his feelings of hurt.

John

John's working life has been spent in hairdressing, both as an employee and as a salon owner. He was 57 years of age at the time of the interview and working in the shop he had previously owned, having decided to sell up but remain working. He had made a conscious decision to start his own business as he felt that it would enable him to gain the respect which he felt he had previously been denied. He felt that 'they would probably respect me as a person rather than put me down as a gay person, that's how I felt.'

John's narrative is often in the style of a stream of consciousness, reminiscent of Molly Bloom in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. He has so much to tell, he seems in a rush to express himself and one thought quickly leads on to another, almost as if he has bottled up his story for years and has to let it out. 'I met her at yoga she happened to be a hairdresser and she said if ever you have a space she said could I come along too which she did I think she worked for me for about three or four years and I said previously...our yoga teacher opened up a new class called.. and awareness and I thought if ever I was going to come out of the closet as it were this is where I would be able to do it because people were vulnerable too...'. His speech is circulatory and he often comes back to a previous topic which he has left unfinished.

John's story is built around the framework of his 'coming out'. Although his story details his academic and employment history, the main focus of the story is before and after coming out, an event which appears pivotal to him. He explains that his life prior to coming out was wasted and he only really began to live life fully after he identified as gay. When he eventually confided in a friend he admits 'I have been carrying it for thirty years'. The choice of the words 'carrying it' suggests an inordinate weight. To actually speak of his homosexuality after so long was extremely traumatic for John and he admits that once it was out in the open he 'just burst into tears'. Strangely, the heterosexual female friend, dismissed the confession saying, 'is that all it is?' showing the polarity of understanding between gay and heterosexual people. Every facet of gay men's lives can be affected by the secrecy and sense of shame they may feel because of their sexuality, indeed many function under the weight of the planning, fear and anticipation which goes into choosing when to come out and to whom.

John first realised that his feelings were at variance with the norm when he was aged about 7. He relates a story about his female cousin and himself when they were looking at a picture of a man and woman holding hands and running along the beach and both expressed a desire to be the girl. He states 'yes I would love to be that girl running along the beach holding that man's hand.' He explains that it wasn't because he wanted to be a girl but because he wanted to be in the company of the man.

John recalls bullying incidents at school but dismisses them as relatively unimportant. He began this section of the interview by stating that he wasn't really bullied, but then went on to relate several bullying incidents, some of which were very unpleasant. He describes how one boy called him names but 'he didn't really mean anything malicious by it'. Later he describes another bullying incident but asserts that he 'didn't associate that at my primary school with my sexuality although as they were a bit older they may have seen something different in me'.

A later occasion is described and he explains his strategy for dealing with it was never one of reporting the incident, of making a complaint or retaliation, rather it was always of avoidance or passive resistance. He describes how at secondary school 'a couple of lads thumped me once and were always taunting me but I used to steer clear of them and I joined a chess club so that I could be indoors in the break time'. He admits, albeit hesitantly, that his 'being bullied... was that traumatic for me that I always kept my distance from everybody'. Later, he confesses that he wishes he had been stronger and that maybe his life would have been different had he had the courage to stand up for himself.

John was allowed to take ballet lessons, but says 'then I got called names...and I only stuck it for a few weeks sadly I couldn't handle it, if I'd been stronger I would probably have been a dancer.' He continues, 'I would love to have been a dancer.' This illustrates the double offence, not only was he bullied but he then took on the blame for being afraid to deal with it. He acknowledges that this affected his life, he missed the opportunity of doing something he really loved and has had to live with that regret.

Even when he started work, he tells of a colleague who used to 'throw tea over me as I walked through the staff room door and she called me queer and poof and things but you just...'. His narrative peters out as he realises that although he had stated that he hadn't been bullied, 'things start to appear when you start

remembering' almost admitting that he had suppressed these memories from his past as they were too painful. His reaction to this particular bullying incident was again passive; he found another job and left immediately and even when asked by the boss 'is there any reason' he responded 'no reason that I want to talk about'. His reaction was 'just clearing off out of it' and this slight remained unchallenged. Perhaps he has come to terms with the incidents after so long but he doesn't describe his feelings at the time. He relates his response to them, what he actually did, but he doesn't describe how he felt. He seems to accept that it was legitimate to be treated like that because he was gay and to take the blame, but possibly time has numbed the feelings.

When John came out to his parents he admits that it was a 'negative spot' for him. His father in particular 'took a long time to come to terms with it em although he didn't say anything about it, he accepted that this was how I was'. The use of the lexis 'negative' and 'accepted' reinforces the sense of this being wrong. The acceptance is almost akin to tolerating something which is deemed unpleasant. However, he continues that his father had the view that 'ooh they're horrible you can't be one of those can you?' John identifies that his father gave the impression that 'he was frightened of them'. 'Them' being a homogenous group into which all gay men were placed, regardless of any other identifiable features.

John explores his parents' reaction and excuses them because they had received 'no sex education whatsoever, so what they got about homosexual people was very negative I would think'. However, he admits that 'it wasn't talked about in the family this feeling that it was nasty and it wasn't nice was something that was over there, you just had nothing to do with it, it was unclean you know'. He observes that other people he has known who were parents of gay sons 'never come out and say "I've got a gay son". It always seems as if they're afraid to acknowledge that they've got a gay son or a lesbian daughter. Never ever have they admitted it.' John revealed that he had lived in this oppressive environment with no one to talk to about his feelings for many years. He also revealed that his father 'had a very prominent feminine side' although he did not elaborate on this. He did however speak 'in defence' of his father's attitude by saying that he allowed him to learn to 'knit and sew that wasn't a problem for him'. Thus suggesting delineated gender roles which were quite acceptable and that his father allowed him to cross these boundaries. Nonetheless, his father had quite rigid ideas about

what was acceptable. John reveals, 'I was given mixed messages that everything was o.k.' but he felt that he was allowed some leeway, 'he made me a pram but didn't make me a dolls house but he made me a pig sty' and also 'I had a dolly to go in the pram'. John identifies what were acceptable toys for boys and for girls and then gives credit to his father for his latitude.

This reaction from his parents spurred John into positive action. He was 35 years of age at the time and felt that he had wasted the previous 30 years of his life and so he joined a gay club. He reports that he was 'amazed' and 'astounded' that there were so many people who were similar to himself in their sexual orientation. He recalls, 'I thought I suppose I wasn't the only person who was feeling like this but you know where are they all? They haven't got "gay" written on their foreheads for God's sake how do they know I am when I don't know any of these are?' The years of confusion and doubt that had led him to feel isolated and excluded, ended for him when he joined the club. Previously he admits that when it came to social events such as 'Christmas parties I always kept away because I knew I couldn't be myself'. He recognised that he had lived a lie for many years.

He agrees with David's perception that gay clubs are always in the 'seedy area in the poor parts of the town or city, they are never in the area where everyone else is it's always shoved over there in the corner where you're supposed not to be quite right'. This reinforces the sense of alienation from main stream society, but also underpins the sense of his sexuality being unacceptable with the use of 'not...quite right'. John's account is littered with these references, quite unconsciously, that homosexuality is wrong, a view reinforced by his parents' attitudes for many years.

He returns several times throughout the interview to the idea that his homosexuality was visible, that people could see just by looking at him that he was gay. He explains that 'I felt for most of my life that I had "gay" written on my forehead'. This visibility was seen as a threat, almost that he was not able to keep his sexuality a secret, even if he wanted to. He explains that he was 'not trying not to be myself but protecting myself not having to say I'm heterosexual and lie but not having to say I'm gay either'.

One feature of the interview is the frequency with which John uses a cup of tea as a panacea for all ills. Every emotional crisis he describes is conciliated with a cup of tea. When coming out to a friend he recalls her reaction. 'When she first

knew I was gay she said right, that's all right, let's get on with it we'll have a cup of tea now and it was all dismissed.' He doesn't express his own feelings at this reaction. Something so huge in his own life, was 'dismissed' by a friend and he seemed happy with that. There is no indignation that she did not discuss it with him or ask about his feelings. This links to the 'acceptance' by his parents. Again, there is no mention of their consideration for his feelings or offers of support or help. It seems as if John's self esteem is so low that he does not expect this consideration. He appears content that the people close to him still accept him, once they know his 'terrible' secret.

John, in his narrative, reveals his innermost feelings about himself, he said, 'I was still this retiring shy person inside who had this flamboyantness wanting to erupt somehow or other unfortunately it seemed to have erupted in the wrong direction'. By using the word 'wrong' he reinforces the idea that he was uncomfortable with his sexuality and that it must remain hidden.

He states that the media representation of gay men in television soaps helped his mum and himself to communicate on some level. She sympathised with a gay character in one of these and was able to draw comparisons between John and this character. John explains that 'he was just the idyllic son but he was gay'. The qualification 'but' suggests again that this was a flaw: in all other aspects he was perfect, the flaw was that he was gay.

John illustrates people's reactions to him when they know he is gay by describing the attitude of one of his customers. After he has been told the John is gay, 'it seemed alright but he didn't really want to speak too much to me although he was still mulling over in his mind that he couldn't quite believe that I was different...now he's fine he's absolutely fine'. The suggestion here is that John expected to be treated differently, he anticipated the reaction and makes excuses for the man's reticence. He accepts the man's reluctance to speak to him and shows understanding. John doesn't question this behaviour and almost forgives it because eventually, the man was fine with it.

Ben

Ben and Dan are partners who are engaged and live together. There is a thirteen year age gap between them, Ben being 37 at the time of the interview and Dan 24. Ben was born in the north of England and Dan comes from London. They were interviewed together and there is evidence of mutual co-operation and encouragement in much of their narratives. They sometimes prompt each other during an anecdote or share feelings of similar situations which have happened to them both.

Ben's narrative is structured around two pivotal events in his life which took on a magnitude for him and resulted in other events becoming secondary. Throughout his story, his current partnership is of crucial importance and plays a huge part in his life, but when recalling his earlier life, everything is related to these two incidents; the first is when he came out, which was particularly traumatic for him and the second was a particularly terrible incident of homophobic bullying which left him in poor health and out of work for some time.

Ben kept his sexuality a closely guarded secret for many years. He recalls, 'I knew I was gay, I knew I was different' as a teenager and he reports that 'it didn't matter that much' and 'it didn't upset me too much that I was pretending'. The fact that he protests several times that it didn't matter, perhaps shows just how much it did matter but that he suppressed those feelings because he anticipated negative reactions. Later at university, he reveals, 'I could ignore the fact I was gay because I was so busy, my life was so busy I didn't need a sexual relationship'. Sooner than admit his feelings, he abstained from any meaningful relationship rather than face his demons.

When Ben speaks about coming out to his family, his style of narration changes to direct speech. He recounts with clarity the responses of his mother, step father and brother in the words they spoke. The reaction of his step father is particularly vivid to him as he even recalls the dialect with which he spoke. Although this was a traumatic period for Ben, he retells it with much affection and gratitude for the reaction he received.

He describes with particular affection the reaction of his step father, Derek, who, by his own admission was of another generation, a product of a northern mining community; 'an ex-miner, ex-army...won every sports cup going, chest of

trophies this big you know, your man's man basically, six foot, broad shoulders' and at that time, seventy years of age. Ben seems to suggest that this man was the epitome of the heterosexual male, in complete contrast with the stereotypical homosexual. He therefore anticipated a very different reaction from the one he got. Derek's reaction is recorded in the dialect with which he spoke, 'now you daft beggar get thysen back home and see me and thee mother' after he had been told Ben's "terrible" news. The image is very vivid and Ben goes on to tell of the emotional support of this man who 'from that point on...started calling me son...em that was, that was clearly quite a special moment'. As Ben falters over the words, the emotion is still evident, even after the intervening 15 years. He admits during the story, 'I feel upset now because Derek's died since and em, and er, and he said "now then son, give me a hug". This was a very positive and supportive outcome resulting from something which Ben had kept hidden for years and dreaded admitting.

When Ben came out to his best friend, the reaction was not so positive. He told this friend first and admitted that he needed to be blind drunk on whiskey before he could get the courage to tell him. Ben was 23 at the time and had never confessed his secret before. He recalls that 'it was like a lump in my mouth actually saying "I'm gay" it was so hard it was incredible'. The emphasis reinforces just how difficult it was for him. Initially, his friend's reaction was 'fine' but later Ben recalls that he became so busy and involved with other things that he stopped seeing Ben altogether. This was terribly painful for Ben as he had summoned the courage to tell the one person in the world he trusted above all others and, as far as he was concerned, was rejected. He admits that he couldn't cope with this and 'phoned Gay Line several times'. [Gay Line is a telephone help line for gay men] Ben was 'really miserable' and recalls with feeling 'I think that was probably the hardest period of my life, was coming out'. He reverts to the present tense whilst telling this part of his story and confesses 'I'm not coping'.

Later, when he decided to tell his mother, he admits that it was 'really hard' and that he 'didn't know what to say'. He was very sensitive to her feelings, over and above his own, because she had been through a difficult divorce some years previously and he didn't want to upset her. He comments 'the last thing she needed was a gay son'. It is interesting to note that he assumed it would be hard for her and he was worried about her reaction. He dreaded her rejection. His style

of speech changes when he tells of the morning he finally decided to tell her. He woke up 'and thought "this is crap I'm just going to do it"'.

He relates the incident in some detail. 'Me and my mum sat down and talked and she had a few tears and cried a bit and said she wondered once or twice and didn't really think it was and wasn't upset by it she was just upset didn't kind of know why she was upset, upset because I was upset probably and upset that it had taken that long and she was also upset that I had told my brothers before her'. The excessive use of the lexis 'upset' reveals much of the emotion of that event and the concern he had for his mother's feelings. This part of his narrative becomes a little confused, almost a stream of consciousness, again, conveying the strength of the emotions being expressed. He concludes this section of his narrative by reliving his feelings after coming out to his mum. 'I remember driving after telling my mum next morning getting into my car and driving back to [the city] having the windows down and singing, having the radio on up full, and sang for four hours all the way home'. The relief is perceptible in an almost physical way.

When questioned about his real father, Ben describes him as 'a bit useless' and always 'disappointing'. His father does not know that he is gay because, as Ben explains, 'I don't think about my dad he doesn't come into my mind ever, he's so, he's so, he's nothing to do with my life anymore'. He posits the idea that fathers have difficulty accepting gay sons because, 'fathers project themselves and their insecurities and stuff on to their sons...they want you to grow up like them...if you turn out gay what are they projecting on you?' He suggests, 'a gay son, it's like they failed somehow isn't it? Their masculinity is in question'. This is an interesting idea and may hold some weight but I also later consider how this idea reinforces the sense of failing their parents which many gay sons have to carry with them throughout their formative years. Ben has another interesting idea about gayness which he positions on a continuum, 'I see people as on this line and there's really really straight people at one end of it, overtly straight really, got to do everything you know "I'm such a man" and then at the other end of the line people who are...so outrageously camp and feminine you know...dress up in lycra and shiny gear...there's everybody all up and down the line and people in the middle who are unsure about their sexuality'. Unconsciously, he is repeating Alfred Kinsey's theory (cited in Corvino 1997:132) from fifty years ago where he

deconstructed sexual orientation and defined it as a bipolar continuum, with exclusive homosexuality at one and exclusive heterosexuality at the other, with many different categories in between. Ben has clearly given this much thought in trying to come to terms with his own sexuality.

Ben was a teacher for ten years and his experiences in the school staffroom are reminiscent of those related by David, when he describes whilst 'people don't know you're gay they make the usual gay jokes...you bite your tongue and you don't say anything'. He admits that because of his desire to keep his sexuality secret, there were 'lots of uncomfortable times' but admits that with practice, 'you can be invisible'.

There is a pent up anger at his self-imposed silence and perceived weakness here, illustrated by the strength of his language. He describes how, 'It makes you feel worse because you should be standing up for yourself and saying "Hey you fuckers, you know, I'm gay what do you think you're talking about".' He likens this to being black or disabled although he notes that both of those situations are visible, whereas being gay isn't. There is an overlap at this point where Dan joins in when saying 'it makes you feel worse'. He had just admitted that he had felt this anger too. 'It's really really hard and part of it's because you're not strong enough to say "this is who I am" so it makes you feel worse'.

At this point of the interview, Ben begins an unsolicited monologue about a bullying incident at the school where he taught. His speech becomes faster and more forceful. There are no pauses or fillers in his speech and it is almost as if the floodgates have opened and he needs to tell this story which affected his life so completely. He describes a particularly difficult year 8 group he had been teaching and repeats several times that he had been 'working so hard' with them. Ben was a very committed teacher and believed that he was making headway with this troublesome group, many of whom were excluded from other classes. He recalls one particularly difficult boy. 'He'd obviously had a really bad day one day and he came in and called me every gay name under the sun, in front of the rest of the class and this was a time when I was feeling particularly fragile because I didn't feel I was being very well supported by the Head...this boy was just vile in his attack on me in front of 30 kids who I'd been working so hard with...I can't believe he absolutely destroyed me in front of my class'. His emotion is evident here as he reverts to the present tense when describing his disbelief at the attack which he

describes as 'vicious'. The adjectives he uses such as 'vile' and 'vicious' convey the severity of the attack and he describes how the boy 'blew up like a firework' and was 'spitting in my face'. Ben confesses that he 'was in tears'. He was hurt, not only by the attack, but also because his 'private life [was] suddenly exposed and those 30 kids were then going outside and telling all their friends'. He had been outed in the most ferocious way.

Ben was affected by this incident in two ways; firstly, by the actual attack and secondly, by the lack of support from the Head whom he describes as 'pathetic really' and the school authorities. This homophobic attack was never formally addressed and there is a sense that it was hidden, swept under the carpet because no-one knew how to deal with it. The final straw came for Ben when the boy was allowed to return to class and 'just turns up grinning'. Nothing had been done. The bitterness is evident when Ben reveals that there was eventually an agreement of 'constructive dismissal which was basically they had to pay me an amount of money to not discuss it any further or take it to a tribunal whatever, I could have taken it a lot further but that would have meant going public and in the press and I wasn't prepared to put our life out there'. Not only was the homophobia ignored but Ben was also forced into silence because of the agreement and also because he was not prepared to face the media representation of his private life. The feeling of bitterness and impotence is tangible as he tells this part of his story. He has had to be complicit in this web of silence and the reluctance to address blatant homophobia. He admits that the incident left him 'very very poorly' and feeling depressed. He describes the 'complete paranoia' he experienced. 'You suddenly think everyone is talking about you'.

Ben's predicament did not end there. When he tried to return to teaching, he felt 'physically sick'. He describes how he 'was just, I can't even describe how I felt it was just awful'. The full extent of this homophobic bullying and the consequences to the victim had never been considered or addressed by those in authority. Coupled with this were Ben's feelings of betrayal by those who should have used their authority to put a stop to it such that it never happened again. Their failure to act reinforced his idea that gay men do not deserve the same consideration as other minority groups. He also suggests that this was detrimental to the pupils who witnessed the attack. 'That class saw a really vile gay attack on

someone, nothing was ever said to those kids, it wasn't discussed, so what's the message going to them?' Not only did this convey by implication that behaviour of this kind was acceptable and would elicit no repercussions, but also, for those pupils who were beginning to identify as gay themselves, it reinforced the idea that they must keep it a secret or run the risk of experiencing such treatment themselves.

Dan

Dan tells his story chronologically, beginning with his experiences at school, through to his history of employment and his recent venture of returning to education. Dan is a quiet and thoughtful man and I became far more involved in his interview because I felt I needed to ask questions in order to prompt a response and elicit information. I tried not to lead Dan in any direction but attempted to encourage a response and overcome his reticence. This reserve may have been as a result of shyness or perhaps because he did not know me too well. I wonder also if it were because I was asking him to recall painful experiences in his past. There are examples of contradictions within his story.

Initially he admits that he 'didn't like school that much...because I felt so different when I was there'. This statement was followed by a long pause, as if he were remembering those days or perhaps evaluating his feelings. He explains what he means by being different, 'you know boys being interested in boys doesn't fit in and it's not something you can talk about.' This sense of alienation began at school and was reinforced by the environment in which he found himself. He was aware that his feelings were deemed wrong and at variance with the majority of his peers. This alienation and feeling of not fitting in was highlighted by some of his experiences at school. He tells of 'waiting outside classrooms when groups of guys used to wait together and there was always the rumours about the boy who doesn't have girlfriends'.

There followed some contradictory comments about Dan's feelings at the time. He recalls, 'it didn't bother me I used to kind of thrive on the attention in a way and it would just make me a stronger person in a way but I used to dread it inside I wouldn't let anybody else see that I would be strong on the outside but on the inside I hated it'. The bravado of 'it didn't bother me' doesn't match with the

feelings of 'dread' which he describes. The word 'dread' has connotations of something to be feared and is quite a strong emotion. Also by suggesting that it made him a stronger person, suggests that it was not a comfortable experience and one for which he had to steel himself. He also admits that he 'didn't like being so different and having to explain myself to people that didn't understand me'.

When asked if he was ever bullied at school, Dan believes he was lucky not to have been physically attacked. There is a sense that verbal bullying is less painful. 'I was lucky I was never beaten up or bullied in a way I felt a little bit bullied'. He recalls that he was called names 'constantly day in and day out' and also that homophobic comments were written about him on an underpass near the school. There is a sense in his narrative that this was bearable and almost acceptable because it wasn't physical abuse. There is little appearance of indignation or injustice. Dan never states that this shouldn't have happened to him, rather that he was relieved it was relatively mild bullying. He reinforces this by repeating 'I was lucky I wasn't beaten up or bullied [pause] I just kind of enjoyed the attention you know I did enjoy being different'. The pause suggests that he is trying to evaluate his feelings or come to terms with what he is revealing. Again, there is a contradiction here, on the one hand dreading being noticed and generating name calling but then stating that he enjoyed the attention. The sense of bravado and defiance is very strong here.

He later admits that he 'found it very difficult at that time to be strong enough and confident to say "this is me".' There is regret at his seeming lack of courage and he discloses that he 'just found it tough and hard' to be himself in the school environment. This links to the earlier comment in Ben's interview when Dan joined in to confess that 'it makes you feel worse' when he was unable to stand up for himself and challenge the prejudice of others.

When speaking about coming out to his mother around the age of 15 or 16, Dan explains that he 'assumed she always knew'. Throughout this part of the interview he repeats this statement several times, although he doesn't explain how he came to this conclusion. He states that he 'was raised gay I suppose' but again, he does not explain what he means by this. He repeats that 'she brought me up gay' but it is unclear how his upbringing was linked to becoming gay. He has three brothers, none of whom are gay, and he does not explain how their upbringing was any different from his own. His mother's reaction must have been a shock for Dan

because he recalls her saying, 'Oh God, you're gay' and admits that she was shocked and bewildered. Her immediate reaction was to write off to gay support groups, which likely reinforced the negative feelings within Dan that this news had upset his mother so much and that she needed support to deal with the terrible news. Dan was very close to his mother following her divorce from his father and he emphasizes this closeness several times throughout the interview. He needed her approbation far more than that of his father.

When asked about his father, Dan was rather scathing. He notes that 'he's always been a let down'. Dan revealed that he did not have a good relationship with his father and explains, 'I've never really needed him...never bonded with him' and that his dad 'never took time to know me... and he still doesn't know me'. There is no anger in this statement, just an acceptance of the inevitable. Dan laughs when relating his dad's reaction to the news that he was gay. 'He said that I should have testosterone injections and that would cure me'. The lexis, cure, suggests an illness or disease from which it is possible to recover. This is quite a confusing and muddled part of the interview. Dan is dismissive of his dad and his reactions and claims that he 'didn't really care what he thought anyway' but he then confesses that he 'loved the fact that he was so shocked that one of his sons was gay and I loved that (laughs) the man's a moron'. Perhaps this is a coping strategy for the rejection by his father. He assumes a humour by laughing during the narration, although it must have been a painful experience to have his sexuality likened to a disease. Perhaps some reaction is better than no reaction, whether it be positive or negative. He reveals that as a child when his father was still at home, 'he was nasty' to Dan. 'He did get physical towards me sometimes I mean he did give me a black eye once...I wasn't abused, well I was abused but I wasn't continually abused'. The confusion about his feelings are evident here, as he accuses his father of abuse but then backtracks and withdraws the statement, making excuses for him. There is an underlying feeling of anger and bitterness but perhaps also a need for acceptance. Dan states, 'I don't know how I feel about him yet' leaving open the possibility to reassess their relationship at a later date. He concludes this part of the interview by suggesting that his father 'crawled out from a rock I suppose', reinforcing his contradictory emotions and illustrating his confusion about their relationship.

When asked about his employment since leaving school Dan admits that he has 'always had good experiences and... always been very lucky'. He has worked in many environments, but they have always been those where his sexuality has been accepted. Although he never consciously chose a job where being gay would be accepted but often he worked amongst women who were 'great fun' and in the travel industry 'it was a really gay environment'. His employment situations have been very positive, much more so than at school. He is now training as a counsellor, perhaps enabling him to use his own experiences to help others.

These five stories were told in diverse ways. The language used is often different, the strength of feelings is conveyed in various ways and there are examples of bravado used to hide, buried and deep felt emotions. Freeman (1993:3 cited in Roberts 2002:127) suggests the link between narrative and memory in the construction of self, is 'the process by which one's past and indeed oneself is figured anew through interpretation'. While the men and their experiences differ, there are areas of commonality which are particular to their situation as a minority group within a predominantly heterosexual society. All are made to feel different and their experiences often mirror this difference and alienation. In the next chapter, I identify what seem to be the principal similarities and analyse the perceptions expressed by the participants.

Chapter 7

Identifying and Analysing Themes

'People think they just want to know the 'facts'; they think they believe in some sort of empirical truth, but what they really want is a story. And that's what this will be: the events of your life categorized and classified and then structured as you would structure any story. No, no, I'm not talking about falsifying, about lying, for heaven's sake. I'm simply talking about making a pattern. That's what I'm doing with all this stuff, offering a cohesion to that random catalogue of deliberate achievement and sheer accident that constitutes your life.'

Brian Friel, *Making History*
Act 2 sc ii

The Focus for Analysis

This chapter categorises the data into some common denominators and analyzes the findings within the current socio-economic context. As Erben (1998:8) points out, 'Biographical investigation must involve the continual examination of the interplay of family, primary group, community and socio-economic forces. To explore one without the others is to impoverish interpretation.' Nonetheless, I am also aware that by making these choices, I am imbuing the study with my own interpretation.

I have selected topics for analysis, which seemed to me to generate the most reaction within my subjects but also which seemed a common experience for all my interviewees. By the very act of analysis, I shape the stories in a myriad of ways. Denzin (1997:249) proposes that researchers who analyse data,

> turn the story told into a story analyzed. In so doing, they sacrifice meaning for analytic rigor. They privilege the analyst's listening ear. They only hear and read the story from within a set of predetermined structural categories. They do not hear the story as it was told.

By having a strong awareness of this possibility, I believe that I have been able to avoid it. Indeed, the structural categories were decided upon after having carried out the interviews and after allowing the subjects to speak for themselves. It is from their accounts that the categories arose.

All of the interviewees recorded that, from a very early age, they were aware that they were different in some respects, to their peers. Initially, they were unaware of just what this difference was, but later came to associate it with their sexuality. It is with this category that I begin this section.

Awareness of Being Different

All the subjects interviewed, had a very strong sense of 'being different' and all admitted in various ways that they 'felt so different' even though they could not at that time identify just what that difference was. All were aware from a very early age that their feelings, and to whom they were attracted, were definitely at variance with others around them. Bem (1997:128) describes 'an individual's sense of being different from same- or opposite-sex peers is not a one-time event, but a

protracted and sustained experience throughout the childhood and adolescent years'. Later, when the participants were able to associate this difference with their sexuality, the feeling of difference took on a greater significance. Indeed, John said, 'I started to recognise an attraction towards other males... I must have been about 10 or 11 years of age'. Butler (1990:137) argues that research has shown that at least 10 per cent of the population has 'chromosomal variations that do not fit neatly into the XX - female and XY - male set of categories and therefore the sex/gender binaries are inadequate'. This being said, much of western society seems rigid and rigorous in its desire to categorise people according to sex and sexuality and in many ways, this accounts for these men feeling this imposition of alienation.

The passing of the notorious Section 28 of the Local Government Act of England and Wales in 1988, exacerbated the already hostile situation for gay men. Spargo (2002:50) explores this idea of identification already implicit and then further highlighted by this Act. She argues that

> Section 28 relied on a homophobic idea of innocent (and implicitly heterosexual) children being led astray, it raises the question of how we come to see ourselves as gay or straight. If homosexuality and heterosexuality are categories of knowledge rather than innate properties, how do we learn to know ourselves in this way?

This dilemma was evident in the stories of all the participants and all expressed their sense of confusion from an early age. This confusion continued throughout puberty.

Conversely, another view is mooted by someone personally affected by the clause. Epstein (1994:33) records that her interviewee, Helen, stated,

> One good thing I see as having come out of the Clause 28 business was that it raised the profile of gays and lesbians. A lot of the publicity was bad, but at the same time, it gave the message that we are present in sufficient numbers to be worth legislating about, even if it was legislating against.

This begs the question, how are our 'norms' defined? How did these gay men know that they were different from the majority of their peers and, more importantly, how were they made aware that their feelings and inclinations were inferior or even unacceptable? Another participant in Epstein's research (1994:198) suggests that '...there is a presumption of heterosexuality which is encoded in language, in institutional practices and the encounters of everyday life.' If this is the case, this difference is implicated in every part of their lives: every aspect of life is driven by hetero-normativity and they will always be alienated. According to Spargo (1999:48)

> As Foucault's work and the experience of some affirmative homosexual politics has shown, demanding the recognition of a distinct homosexual identity inevitably reaffirms a binary and unequal opposition between homosexual and heterosexual.

This goes some way to explaining David's experience of alienation and a need for secrecy: 'I was aware of a burgeoning gay sexuality...I was also suppressing it'.

Aetiological theories abound relating to the origin and identification of sexual orientation. Essentialists believe that sexual orientation is a detached, culturally independent attribute which is genetically determined and instinctive. In opposition, Constructionists aver that sexual orientation has a direct correlation to culture; identifying sexuality as a category that is a product of a particular culture. Accordingly they believe that homosexuality is learned. Sedgwick (1991:41) highlights the problem inherent in trying to distinguish between the two, given that

> the gay essentialist/ constructivist debate takes its form and premises from, and insistently refers to, a whole history of other nature/nurture or nature/culture debates, it partakes of a tradition of viewing culture as malleable relative to nature: that is, culture, unlike nature, is assumed to be the thing that can be changed.

Here Sedgwick envisages the impossibility of reconciling with either theory, given the preconceptions we have. Similarly, there seems little value in wrestling

with an irreconcilable debate, when these men clearly feel different from the majority and are made to feel this difference, and none were aware of having made an autonomous choice. John's comments such as, 'I didn't like being so different' and Dan explaining, 'I somehow... do not feel I fit in', illustrate the impact this difference has had on their lives and in fact, continues to do so. David admits that he doesn't 'feel in myself a part of mainstream society'. This alienation seems a common experience for all the interviewees and its seat appears to lay in their sexuality.

One factor with which they are all in agreement, is that they were painfully aware, once they realised they were different from the mainstream, that they had to keep this difference suppressed and not reveal it to anyone. John admits, 'Whenever that I felt that attraction I felt that I had to suppress it'. He could not give way to his natural feelings. Mac an Ghail's (1994:169) earlier research illustrates this sense of fear and aversion to being placed in this disagreeable category. His subjects noted that

> misogyny, contingent homophobia and racism were contradictory constitutive elements of white male forms of heterosexuality. They recalled white boys, in learning to be straight men, obsessively distancing themselves from ascriptions of femininity and homosexuality within themselves and towards others.

Mills (2004:31) also acknowledges this strategy in his research on male teachers in Australia. He notes that

> Homophobia is a powerful mechanism by which the privileges of men are maintained and by which men who challenge the existing gender order are punished. The disdain and antagonism that many boys and men display towards male homosexuality can be read as an outcome of its potential to undermine traditional constructs of masculinity.

Thus, for my subjects, once they realised their difference, they were also aware, because of others' aversions, that they were in an unenviable situation and they did all they could to keep it secret. The society in which they functioned,

made it clear that homosexuality was undesirable and gay men became objects of derision.

The men describe their bewilderment and inner turmoil as they grew up aware of their dissimilarity to others around them. All expressed their feelings of alienation and secrecy. However, as they grew to understand their situation, they began to feel that their sexual difference was evident to everyone else around them. The next section explores their feelings of exposure and transparency.

How do they know I am gay?

Foucault (1976:43) states in his *History of Sexuality volume 1*, that the homosexual being was visible because,

> Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions...written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away.

My interviewees subscribe to this suggestion that their homosexuality is visible. Indeed, all tell of their sense of transparency and how they felt that their sexuality was visible and evident to everyone around. This was particularly the case before revealing their sexuality. This secret that they kept to themselves was still evident to others and they believed it would be discovered because, as John expressed, 'when you go through life that you think you must have "gay" tattooed on your forehead you think everyone must suss you out'. Running through their narratives is a pervasive feeling of potential exposure in every activity they undertake, and a strong sense that they must be careful not to give themselves away. As David said, 'Locked into my mind was that you know you mustn't give any signs that and I was trying my darndest not to give these signs and yet everyone was picking these signs up'.

Martino (2003:13) suggests that 'masculinity can be signified by modes of walking, talking, muscular appearance, facial hair etc. It can also be signified by external, deliberate adornment in clothing, jewellery, make up etc. This is how boys can reveal or conceal their sexual identity'. Obviously the converse is true, that homosexuality can be signified by these same criteria, but in a different way. If gay men want to conceal their sexuality, then it might be presumed that they

would adopt the outward signs of heterosexual masculinity. Interestingly, the rainbow flag adopted as a gay signifier has its origins in the coloured handkerchiefs worn by gay men to send signals to others of their shared homosexual orientation.

Butler (1990, 1993) developed the notion of performativity to explain her belief that particular body language, gestures and movements identify the gender and sexuality of a person. Butler (1990:173) suggests that

> acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality.

This gender visibility, she argues, establishes a recognisable category into which people fit, identifying whether they belong to the acceptable heterosexual norm or whether they belong to the 'other' unacceptable group of homosexuals. That is not to say that it is a deliberate choice and that they act out the part they have chosen, rather that it is an unconscious mode of behaviour and gestures which signal their sexuality. If this is the case, then perhaps these gay men have adopted a mode of behaviour and mannerisms, albeit unconsciously, which actually signal to others that they are gay.

De Beauvoir (1949:281) writing about women, suggests that

> No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

This can be applied to the identity of the gay man, inasmuch as the learnt behaviour which categorises a woman or a man, can also be learnt by men. This identity is not pre-determined at birth, but rather constructed by society and civilisation.

This theory is a further development of the Social Construction Theory propounded by Foucault (1976:105-108) which posits that categories of identity are a creation of culture. 'Society develops labels and social scripts for the creation of identities which are entirely arbitrary. Social Constructionists believe that there are

no essential, inborn and ageless criteria for identity, rather that certain human features assume importance as a result of society's temporal needs or dictates' (Unks 1995:44).

This being said, the social construction of identity presents problems when that society considers heterosexuality to be the norm and the identity to which everyone must ascribe, and for those who don't, an anomalous identity is created. Butler (1999:23) identifies that 'the heterosexualisation of desire requires and institutes the production of discrete and symmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine" where these are understood as expressive attributes of "male" and "female"'. She argues that a 'heterosexual, heterosexist culture establishes the coherence of those categories in order to perpetuate and maintain "compulsory heterosexuality" the dominant order in which men and women are required or even forced to be heterosexual'. Butler (1999:24) further describes this idea of compulsory heterosexuality as,

> the peculiar alliance presumed to exist between a system of compulsory heterosexuality and the discursive categories that establish the identity concepts of sex. If "identity" is an *effect* of discursive practices, to what extent is gender identity construed as a relationship among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire, the effect of a regulatory practice that can be identified as compulsory heterosexuality?

Such an argument helps to explain the feelings experienced by gay men and their belief that they are different and that their identity is evident, because it does not conform. This theory of 'compulsory heterosexuality' also goes some way to explaining how this sense of concealment generates the idea that everyone is aware of their deception. The subjects of my study acknowledge that they receive comments such as, 'yes we guessed you were gay really' throughout their lives and relate them in their stories. Ben, an ex-teacher, remembers that 'I thought for a long time that the kids probably did know but thankfully they were all really cool about it'. The gratitude with which he describes their acceptance suggests conformity to the heterosexual assumption which many in western society deem normal.

None of the men were aware of what specifically in their mode of behaviour gave them away, indeed Ben believes that he 'knew no gay people at all, you know I lived such a straight life and everybody thought I was straight'. Nonetheless, all are aware that something about their demeanour made their homosexuality evident. Alan, who was an actor, even suggests that he deliberately acted in a heterosexual manner, although he does not elucidate just what this involved.

Several of the interviewees describe this feeling of an imaginary label on their foreheads. John explained, 'I felt this for most of my life that I had "gay" written on my forehead not trying not to be myself but protecting myself not having to say I'm heterosexual and lie but not having to say I'm gay either'. He recalled an incident when his homosexuality was discovered, and described how 'he obviously saw something in me you know, so again, the gay tattoo on the forehead must have been very apparent to him I suppose'. This closely guarded secret, seems to have been apparent to others throughout their lives.

In order to reinforce their own masculinity and heteronormativity, many men feel the need to identify homosexuality in others. Martino (2003:14) suggests that 'heteronormative masculinity is often grounded in the regime of misogyny which denigrates the feminine and therefore impacts on anyone identified as less than masculine (non-heterosexual)'.

Conversely, although my participants believe themselves to be identified by this imaginary marking, they acknowledge that the same is not true for other gay men. These men, in fact, remain invisible and thus are unable to identify a kindred spirit. John explained, 'They haven't got 'gay' written on their foreheads for God's sake how do they know I am when I don't know any of these are?' The frustration here is evident but it is also puzzling why they believe they are visible to the whole world, but cannot identify others in the same situation.

Not only are gay men identified by their physical performance, but also via discourse. Butler (1990:54) posits that one of the ways in which gender identity is constructed is by discourse. She states that, 'Gender is not the conceptual or cultural extension of chromosomal/biological sex but an ongoing discursive practice currently structured around the concept of heterosexuality as the norm of human relationships'. One of the participants, David, acknowledged that his sexuality had been discovered by what he had said to a colleague.

> So I said "how did you know I was gay then?" and she said... we were doing observed lessons...when there were questions and answers and ...one of the questions was "If you were a member of the opposite sex what is it you would most want to do?" and a woman asked me...and I said "I would like to have a baby"...and she said that was how she knew I was gay because her son had said exactly the same thing.

The interviewees all tell stories of being aware for the first time that they were different from their friends and family; they relate how other people recognised this difference and their feeling of transparency. They also tell of the great lengths they went to in order to hide this difference. They lived their lives in secrecy for fear of the repercussions. The next section explores in greater depth, this sense of secrecy.

Secrecy

Lord Alfred Douglas, lover of Oscar Wilde, referred to homosexuality as 'the love that dare not speak its name'. Although he made this comment over a century ago, this, in many instances, still rings true. The participants all reveal that at some point in their lives, and for some, most of their adult lives, they lived a covert life, afraid to reveal their homosexual identity. Not only did they feel the need to suppress their sexuality and hide it from others, but some revealed that they were afraid to admit it even to themselves. As David said, 'Because of the stigma and the shame I didn't want to acknowledge it to myself or to anybody else'.

Their lives consisted, for the most part, of a web of lies and deceit in order to cover up the fact that they were attracted to members of the same sex. Some admit that even now, 'I am careful what I say and how far I go'. Their lives are a continual performance, displaying a mask to the outside world. This stance is highlighted by Adrienne Rich (1980:228) when she suggests that 'the retreat into sameness – assimilation for those who can manage it – is the most passive and debilitating of responses...and a renewed open season on difference.' Mohr (1997:282) argues that the secrecy surrounding homosexuality reinforces the notion that gays and lesbians are somehow inferior.

> People need to let the gayness of individuals come up when it is relevant, rather than going along with the shaming social convention of the closet, the demand that every gay person is bound to keep every other gay person's secret secret. For the closet is the site where anti-gay loathing and gay self-loathing mutually reinforce each other.

This contention is reinforced by evidence from this study. The men interviewed seemed largely to consider their persecution and negative treatment justifiable, thus reinforcing their own sense of inferiority to the heterosexual majority. Indeed, they seem to expect to be treated in an inferior manner to heterosexual men and remark, in an affirmative way, when they are not. David relates an incident when he asked his teacher what he thought of homosexuals. His teacher replied that, 'he could accept homosexuals when they made...great contributions such as contributions to drama to acting to music to creative arts like ballet, and also paintings'. David believed that 'the implication was that he didn't actually accept them for their sexuality but that he could accept them for their contributions.' David admits that he 'accepted' this explanation.

There is no sense of outrage that homosexual men have to justify their existence by contributing something to society, whereas heterosexual men can be accepted just for themselves. The acceptance implies complicity and collusion with heterosexual discourses.

The perceived need for secrecy and concealment was exacerbated for those men involved in the teaching profession. Clarke (1998:62) suggests that

> This lack of freedom is compounded by the fact that education is by nature and tradition a conservative profession. It is a profession that is seen to be entrusted with the education of young and potentially vulnerable minds, and as such, the profession has always had a real responsibility to uphold high standards of behaviour and conduct in order to fulfil one of its functions, that of being a role model for young people.

David, once a newly qualified teacher in this position, reveals, 'I was worried about what parents would say, what the governors would say, what about my job

you know I wanted to stay in teaching I didn't want to be hounded out of the job I didn't want to tell anybody'. He was very aware that had his secret identity been revealed, it would have had dire consequences which would impact on his future employment. He made a conscious decision to conceal his identity, as he said, 'This was 1991 and I was a newly qualified teacher and my initial thought was I don't want anyone to see this'.

Students in classes add to the dilemma, as David reveals, 'I had students who asked me if I was gay...and my initial response in the first couple of years was quite defensive '. David realised very early on that in order to keep his job and maintain some level of respect from the students, he had to conceal this part of his life. Another subject, Alan, admits that this pretence to keep his sexuality a secret was rather like a game. 'So when they were trying to catch me out, I saw it as a challenge which I actually rather enjoyed'. Ben also reinforced this sense of secrecy which was necessary and reveals that, like himself, there were 'people who were fundamentally gay were wanting to lead a conventional lifestyle'. This façade was necessary to enable them to function effectively within the constraints of western society.

Performances to conceal sexuality become a lifestyle many gay teachers feel forced to adopt. Clarke (1998:65) argues that these teachers 'have to perform in order to survive in a heterosexist and homophobic world, therefore these performances should not be trivialised.' Alan, who was both an actor and a teacher, reveals that he 'was armed by being an actor so you can play a role'.

It is not only the students who can create problems for the gay teacher, colleagues, too can be very condemnatory and lacking in understanding. It is disturbing that in such an environment, prejudice and discrimination remains. Ben admitted that he had experienced 'lots of uncomfortable times when you feel a bit...'. The sentence trails off as he struggles to find words to express his feelings. David accuses his peers of being 'quite bigoted like that because they think there is no-one in the room who cares'. Clarke (1998:64) notes, in her study of lesbian teachers' experiences, that 'Conversations in staffrooms that revolved around personal relationships were regarded with some unease since they could

potentially be sites where their heterosexual cover might be blown.' This fear of exposure is reinforced by the gay teachers in my study.

Not only were conversations in the staffroom difficult, but social activities were another potential minefield to be negotiated. David reveals, 'if there had ever been a big social occasion where all the staff brought their partners I wouldn't have felt confident to take John which I felt awful because it sounds as if I were ashamed of him'. This secrecy was not only a problem for the gay teacher involved, but additionally for his partner. Clarke's (1998:65) research about lesbian teachers illustrates how 'the main form of strategies for passing as a heterosexual was through censorship and removal of the self from potentially hazardous situations i.e. non-attendance at staff socials, avoidance of certain conversations/debates in staffrooms'. Ben explains that some of the staff at his school knew he was gay, but 'that was my immediate colleagues but I don't think it was spoken about widely but there were lots of colleagues who didn't know and I didn't want to come out in that way'.

The whole lifestyle within the arena of education was fraught with possible exposure for these gay teachers insofar as they felt a lack of support for their position. They believe it imperative that they keep their sexuality a secret because they know that, once revealed, they would receive little backing. Ben posits that 'senior management feel cornered...there are all sorts of implications aren't there, what are parents going to say, are parents going to complain, are governors going to complain, what's going to happen to me, what's going to happen to my staff, what's going to...'.

Whilst these men felt forced to lead a double life, this begs the question, where do the young and impressionable students find role models? This is particularly pertinent if they, too, are attracted to people of the same sex and they see no role models amongst their teachers. The fact that their teachers hide their sexuality, reinforces the idea that this is something wrong and shameful, and so this need for secrecy is likely to be replicated in the next generation. It becomes a self- fulfilling prophecy that they must hide their shame and live a life of deception. Alan realises the value his presence had for gay students in his class when he was teaching 'a lot of sixth form work and it was obvious there that people that were

gay, like Matthew Bourne [this reference from a previous conversation before the interview] and his friend Simon Carter, were very pleased to have someone, nothing was said but it was just implied'.

When homosexuality was still illegal, there was even more pressure to retain this aura of secrecy. Public icons were used as scapegoats to convey the message that this form of sexuality was intolerable and would be punished. Alan, who lived through this era, explained that 'you had to be discreet generally, you know, Montague, Peter Wildeblood and Michael Pitrivers the three people who were all sent to prison, all people who were well known, quite substantial'. This incident was well publicised, and even 40 years later, programmes are still being televised which document the event. 'A Very Public British Sex Scandal' was recently broadcast on Channel 4 to mark the 40th anniversary of the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the interviewees experiences reinforce the oppressive regime under which they lived. Lord Hailsham, in 1954, considered homosexuality 'contagious and incurable' and attributed the increase to the after effects of the war. Electric shock treatment and aversion therapy was still being used at that time and, indeed, up until 1970, to 'cure' the disease which was homosexuality. These men also tell of prison sentences for being "caught out" and the crime of buggery attracted a life sentence.

Although writing specifically about lesbian experiences, Clarke (1998:66) explores the secret lives lived by lesbian women in certain situations and their resistance to oppressive practices. What she says can, I believe, be applied to gay men. She posits the idea that heterosexuality and a heterosexual lifestyle can be, and often is, duplicated in order to generate a disguise. Clarke comments,

> Allied with these strategies for resisting, performing a particular part can also be viewed as a subversive and resistant act, insofar as the performance is a way of throwing heterosexuality back in your face. Since where the part is successfully performed then the point is made (albeit largely privately) that heterosexuality can be copied, faked and bought without it being realised that it is merely an imitation.

This imitation reinforces recognition that a heterosexual lifestyle is deemed 'normal' and acceptable. This reinforces the notion posited by Halperin (1989:8)

who identifies a 'straight-acting and appearing gay male, [as] a man distinct from other men in absolutely no other respect besides that of his "sexuality".' Ben reveals that he 'went to parties and still kissed girls and did all of that, just for pretence really'. He could mimic the lifestyle of a heterosexual, fooling everyone, even girlfriends, although he admits that he felt remorse and recounts his feelings. 'I'm telling a lie now and it's not fair on her and I was beginning to feel guilty'. This feeling of guilt was twofold; one that he was pretending to be something he was not and two, that he was involving someone else who was going to get hurt. He felt that he was in an untenable position.

It is not only the gay man who lives a life of secrecy and deception. David, John and Dan tell of parents who are ashamed to admit to having a gay son or daughter. Perhaps this is because of a perceived stigma attached, or because their parents feel that they have failed in some way, or even that it is their fault. Most of my subjects and their parents seem to have a need to apportion blame. The parents' silence and secrecy reinforces for the gay man that his sexuality is taboo and should remain undisclosed; not only are his parents ashamed, but he should be too.

Whilst most of the men in this study acknowledge their approach to maintaining secrecy, Alan used an entirely different strategy to deal with questions about his sexuality. He believed that being open and honest was the best strategy and he notes that 'what youngsters don't like is if you are gay and you're covering it up...they'll find out'.

The men in my study all accept that secrecy has been a necessary part of their lives and have coped with it in different ways. Another theme which was common was the consequences of this identification. All suffered bullying, in various guises and in varying degrees and it is to an exploration of these incidents of bullying that I now turn.

Bullying

Homophobic bullying has been experienced by all the men interviewed. The forms it took varied in severity from physical violence, name calling, to verbal abuse. Often physical violence was deemed far less painful to endure than verbal abuse. Much of this bullying was accepted by the victim as a natural consequence of his homosexuality, although occasionally it was questioned why they should be

the victim of these attacks. This begs the question – why? Why do others feel the need to attack someone because of their homosexuality and why do the victims endure it? Mohr (1997:333) suggests that

> many non gay people feel socially required to be gay-fearing or gay-hating even when they are not homophobic by personal inclination. Many people do not on their own feel hostile to gays but feel compelled to go along with the rituals that degrade and silence gay life, lest they themselves be viewed as morally suspect.

This rationalizes some homophobic behaviour from men; they need to show their aversion to homosexual men in order to establish their own heterosexuality, or at least the appearance of being heterosexual. This denigration of homosexuality also acts as a bonding mechanism for some heterosexual men.

Sedgwick develops this idea of heterosexuality's dependence on a stigmatised homosexuality. In *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990:44-48) she examines the ways in which male homo-social bonding is structured around hostility to homosexuality and claims that the basis of heterosexual identity and reinforcement of this normality is based on the rhetoric of identifying anything homosexual as abnormal, underpinning the acceptance of heteronormativity. To bully a gay man is to reinforce their own heterosexual identity.

Some of the men interviewed, suggested that those who were more vociferous in their attacks on gay men, may well have been hiding a latent homosexuality and using abuse to hide it. Ben describes a student of his who 'had a chip on his shoulder, I think it might have been a case of latent homosexuality, often people who are homophobic turn out to be homosexual', although of course there is no proof here, just a suggestion.

Martino (2003:7) in his study of school aged children, suggests that homophobia and homophobic bullying are more prevalent amongst boys than girls. He posits that homophobia is 'a specific technique of self-regulation and surveillance of other boys'. This suggestion is further strengthened when Martino (2003:89) suggests that it is a sign of burgeoning masculinity 'to be prejudiced and to make prejudiced remarks and jokes', thus reinforcing the whole ethos of male superiority and domination. Some of the experiences of my subjects lend support

to this notion, both that it was predominantly bullying from males which they experienced and also that it was a way of establishing macho status to be seen to bully the gay pupil. Viv Ellis re-visited the research of Trenchard and Warren (1984) on the experiences of being bullied in schools of lesbian, gay and bisexual pupils and found that 'there were highly significant increases in reports of verbal abuse, isolation, teasing, physical assault, being ostracized and being subject to pressure to conform in 2001.' However, these examples of bullying were not attributed exclusively to male perpetrators.

David described 'quite horrendous homophobia from little boys, boys in particular who would outright say to me, they would use the word queer, are you queer?' Unks (1995:6) reveals that adolescents, more than any other age group, are likely to commit violence against homosexuals. Although David did not specify the gender of the bully here, in all my other interviews, it was reported that it was the males who carried out the bullying. Only John reported an incident of bullying by a female in the work place. He also recounted an incident when at school, 'I heard someone running and I didn't know who they were and I felt an almighty thump around my head and I turned round and there were these two lads making off very quickly'. Ben, when relating a particularly vicious homophobic attack on him by a pupil cannot explain what initiated this attack, as far as he could recall, there seemed to have been no trigger, but the boy 'absolutely destroyed me in front of my class I really couldn't get to grips with how much it affected me because I had never, ever experienced a single child personally insulting me'. This unprovoked and unfounded attack left Ben shocked at the viciousness generated by someone so young.

Not only was the homophobic attack a great shock to him, but he also comments on the lack of support he received. 'I feel as if I have been let down' and the incident left him 'feeling really miserable as sin'. These feelings are echoed by the other subjects of the study who concur that these bullying incidents affected them deeply even though they might hide it from the world. Dan reveals that he 'used to dread it inside I wouldn't let anybody else see that I would be strong on the outside but on the inside I hated it'. This conspiracy of silence was an accepted form of survival amongst the interviewees.

This trait of identifying masculinity with being prejudiced and in particular, being homophobic, is not exclusive to young boys, but is carried over into maturity.

It is seen as a marker of masculinity and for many heterosexual men, if they can mete it out to a gay man, it somehow raises their kudos with their peers and reinforces their status as a man. Indeed, Mohr (1997:333) states that

> many nongay people feel socially required to be gay-fearing or gay-hating, even when they are not homophobic by personal inclination. Many people do not on their own feel hostile to gays but feel compelled to go along with the rituals that degrade and silence gay life, lest they themselves be viewed as morally suspect.

It can be a form of a shared sense of brotherhood amongst 'real' men. One of Epstein's (1994:18) participants admits that 'I did call people queer...perhaps to protect myself from abuse'.

Dan recalled his feeling of dread when he knew he was going to be bullied by 'a group of people and it would always be the same people and you would think "Oh God" and what they said...they did say funny things and funny comments but it's not so funny when you have to hear them constantly day in and day out'. If this is the case, then perhaps heterosexual men feel their masculinity is threatened through association by gender to these homosexual men and therefore need to bully and revile them in order to create and establish a distance between them. If homophobia is a cultural signifier of heterosexual masculinity, then men are performing to type and asserting their masculinity by the bullying of gay men.

Butler (1999:73) comments that 'there has been little effort to understand the melancholic denial/preservation of homosexuality in the productions of gender within the heterosexual frame'. She goes on to draw from Freud in her theorizations of heterosexuality as a 'melancholy' structure of identity 'which is based upon a socially imposed primary "loss" or rejection of homosexual desire'. Butler (1999:74) explains this 'loss of the other whom one desires and loves is overcome through a specific act of identification that seeks to harbour that other within the very structure of the self'. This, in part, explains the latent anger within heterosexual men which sometimes vents itself in the need to denigrate and attack homosexual men. The suggestion is that heterosexuality actually requires homosexuality in order to define itself. Butler (1990:77) posits that 'Homosexuality emerges as a desire which must be produced in order to remain repressed...

heterosexuality produces intelligible homosexuality and then renders it unintelligible by prohibiting it'.

This necessity for the binary oppositions of heterosexuality and homosexuality is an idea developed by several theorists. Butler (1987:34) uses Hegel's claims to explain that 'self-consciousness can only know itself through another, but this process of self-recognition in another is not straightforward, for the Other that the Self has to overcome is in fact a part of itself' (Hegel 1807:111) to ratify and develop this idea. By using the example of one in power and the other subservient, Hegel (1807:115 cited in Butler 1987:34) explains that 'one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman'. Again, this helps to explain the attacks sustained by the interviewees. The heterosexual bullies have to establish their superiority in order to differentiate their position in the power structure, not only for themselves and their own identity, but also for appearances before peers, to stake their claim to a distinctive heterosexual masculinity.

There is some suggestion that homophobic bullying is actually initiated by the victim, purely through their acceptance of hetero-normativity. Mohr (1997:282) suggests that 'every time a gay person finds the closet morally acceptable for himself or others, he degrades himself as gay and sinks to the level of abjection dictated for gays by the dominant culture'. The suggestion here is that gay people actually invite bullying when they collude with the idea that their sexuality is something of which to be ashamed. By accepting and conforming to this secrecy, they send the message that they are different and what they do is wrong.

This acceptance of hetero-normativity is also explored by Epstein and Johnson (1994:198) who suggest that

> one form of heterosexism discriminates by failing to recognize differences. It posits a totally and unambiguously heterosexual world in much the same way as certain forms of racism posit the universality of whiteness. In this way, the dominant form is made to appear normal and natural and the subordinate form perverse, remarkable or dangerous.

Whilst this in some way explains the homosexual male adhering to and accepting the ideal of heterosexual supremacy, it is difficult to imagine an alternative form of behaviour. Homosexual men have been initiated into western society's beliefs of normal and abnormal sexual behaviour and are brought up believing their feelings are wrong, thus perpetuating this myth. This in turn transmits the idea to heterosexual people that this difference is something to destroy – hence the bullying tactics. Implicit in these acts is the idea that homosexuality can be destroyed and obliterated. Butler (1997:143) attempts to explain this aggressive need in heterosexual men to denigrate homosexual men, although ironically,

> renunciation requires the very homosexuality that it condemns, not as its external object, but as its own most treasured source of sustenance. The act of renouncing homosexuality thus paradoxically strengthens homosexuality, but it strengthens homosexuality precisely as the power of renunciation.

The repression is reinforced by society's insistence on heterosexual normativity, however binary opposites are necessary to validate heterosexuality, thereby reinforcing ideas that homosexuality is wrong, and legitimising heterosexuality

This is one explanation of why men feel the need to bully. Butler (1997:79) develops the idea, by suggesting that 'the desire to desire is a willingness to desire precisely what would foreclose desire, if only for the possibility of continuing to desire'. Thus she suggests, concurring with Freud, that heterosexual men, through their repression of homosexuality actually 'produce[s] the desire it prohibits'. Butler's (1997:143) contention is that 'Homosexuality is not abolished but preserved, though preserved precisely in the prohibition of homosexuality.'

This would account for the need within some heterosexual men to make a clear division between themselves and homosexual men, because they fear the repressed desire they may feel and which they consider wrong. Accordingly, they seek to show, in an overt way, their detachment from this other degrading sexuality. Salih (2002:143) suggests that 'the formation of the subject through violence and exclusion is crucial to Butler's theorisations of identity, and she insists that speaking subjects come into existence through exclusion and repression'.

This acceptance of verbal abuse and the avoidance of confrontation, sends out the message that this behaviour is acceptable if the victim is homosexual and

the perpetrator is heterosexual. John relates that when being bullied at work, his silence could be construed as acceptance. The perpetrator of the bullying had previously taunted him by saying 'you won't do anything about it' and this prediction turned out to be true. David also revealed that, when at school, the victims grouped together for support. 'You tended to find people who were like yourself in terms of usually outsiders ... there was a small group of gentle, gentle males, two or three of us and we would meet up at playtime and try to look after one another as much as possible'. However, John describes his experiences of being bullied which were so 'traumatic...that I always kept my distance from everybody'.

Sedgwick (1991:84) suggests that 'overt homophobes are men who are insecure about their masculinity'. This in turn 'supplements the implausible, necessary illusion that there could be a secure version of masculinity and a stable intelligible way for men to feel about other men in modern heterosexual capitalist patriarchy'. She suggests that this is a cause for homophobia because the homosexual is already deemed 'off center, always at fault, endlessly blackmailable...ready to be manipulated into any labor of channelled violence' and is therefore the ideal target for the insecure heterosexual male, to bully and to assert their masculinity by doing so.

These men share the experience of being bullied although the form this took varied, it was nonetheless hurtful and humiliating. There seems no one reason behind this behaviour, indeed it reinforces the challenge presented by coming out. Many of the men, to varying degrees, found coming out a monumental decision and it is their experiences which I now examine.

Coming out

Mohr (1997:282) when writing about coming out, suggests that 'The closet's secret is a dirty little secret that degrades all gay people'. Degrade is a rather strong word to use in this context, although there is some validity in the sense that maintaining this secrecy about their homosexuality sends the message that there is something of which to be ashamed. However, because of the way western society operates, this is a common cultural perception. Gay men know that their secret, once told, will generate many negative reactions. Similarly, heterosexual men know that they never need to reveal their sexuality because no-one is ever

going to question it, or treat them differently because of it. Heterosexuality is a given.

Sedgwick (1991:3) suggests that even though people may know that a man is gay, it is not until he articulates his coming out as a part of his own discourse, that he in actual fact 'comes out'. Knowledge of his sexuality, by his family and friends, does not constitute 'coming out'. Sedgwick contends 'Closetedness itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence – not a particular silence, but a silence that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it'. She emphasises that 'silence is rendered as pointed and performative as speech, in relations around the closet...' (Sedgwick 1991:4)

All the men interviewed remained silent at some stage in their lives: indeed some never articulated the words. Most revealed that, whilst coming out was always going to be difficult, it was particularly so when telling their mothers. Dan relates that he didn't actually tell his mother about his homosexuality. He remembers that his 'brother found [his] diary and was really worried about what he found in it and showed [his] mum and that was kind of how it happened'. Dan was genuinely shocked that his mother was unaware of his homosexuality; he believed it was an unspoken understanding between them. John also reveals the silence sustained between himself and his mother. When they were finally able to talk about it he reveals the relief he felt, 'as if I could talk about it to her...because I hadn't talked to her about it and that helped me'. Ben's feelings were particularly strong when toying with breaking this silence. He remembers thinking, 'How the fuck am I going to tell my mum?' The men continue to feel concern and protective towards their mothers and are sensitive to the difficulty they have created. David explains how his mum 'was still trying to work it out and trying to cope with it herself... she certainly never turned her back on me'. John also tells that his parents needed support in order to deal with his revelation, even though at that time he 'was about 34, 35 then and...I told them I was gay, one of these people was a customer of mine she did Samaritan work and she was she came over and helped my parents through it'. It is not only the gay man who suffers, but his parents may also too.

Coming out seems to have been the pivotal point in the lives of all five men. The force of emotions generated by this act is both surprising and shocking to

anyone who has never had to go through this process. The planning and forethought, the consideration of the negative impact it may have on their friends and family and the anticipation, are tangible in their stories. Most importantly, many considered that once they had taken the decision and revealed their secret, there was no way of turning back. Ben describes it as 'Pandora's box, once it's open you'll not put it back even if you only tell one person, it doesn't matter you'll not put it back once it's out'. Spraggs (1994:180) suggests,

> Coming out is a process, never a once for all time act. Many, perhaps most of us move in and out of the closet several times a day, depending on where we are and who we are with: at home, at work, with family, with trusted friends. There are longer term patterns too: it is not uncommon for gay people to move from a situation in which they have been relatively open about themselves to one in which they have felt constrained to silence.

The reality is that, once out, total secrecy can never be regained and further, there is always the possibility of the secret being revealed in another facet of the gay person's life. However, the converse is also true, that coming out is a continual process in different arenas of the whole life.

Mohr (1997:282) suggests that 'living by the convention of the closet...is a commitment to viewing gayness as disgusting, horrible, unspeakably gross, in short, as abjection. Core cases of abjection are excrement, vomit, pus and the smells associated with these'. These harsh words, although in some ways true, do not take into account the huge step that the revealing of a homosexual identity can be for a gay man. Once revealed, their secret can never be retracted and their lives can never be the same again since they run the risk of losing everything; jobs, relationships, respect and even their standing in society.

Spargo (1999:30) defines revealing sexuality thus. 'Coming out suggests emerging from confinement and concealment into the open, a movement from secrecy to public affirmation,' perhaps giving a more positive spin on the process by using the lexis 'affirmation'. Several of the men interviewed revealed that whilst some experiences of coming out were not planned, they had come to the decision to move out of the closet and this was helped when, as Dan explains, 'people

would say 'you're gay' and I would say 'yes, yes I am'. This was also true for Alan, whose friend 'Yanis... did ask me directly he said "Are you gay?" and I just said "yes"'.

Coming out can also be viewed as a personal statement, like taking a stand and confirming an identity and connection with other gay men. Sedgwick (1991:83) suggests that acknowledging the binary opposition of homosexual and heterosexual identities should not necessarily be viewed as a negative construction. She posits that

> Substantial groups of women and men under this representational regime have found that the nominative category "homosexual"...does have a real power to organize and describe their experience of their own sexuality and identity, enough at any rate to make their self-application of it...worth the enormous accompanying costs. If only for this reason, the categorization commands respect.

Ben confirms this premise when he relates how he and Dan 'were seen much more together and we were seen running a business together I think that raised our profile as probably being a gay couple in the community'. He explains that he 'was so happy with Dan that [he] felt completely comfortable about being more and more open.

The experience of coming out, both in the anticipation and the execution of the event have been difficult for all these men. It is clear that the person to whom it was most difficult to divulge their sexuality was their mother. Nonetheless, the person who had most difficulty dealing with the revelation seems to have been the father. I turn now to consider the problems inherent with this revelation for fathers of gay sons.

Relationships with Fathers

The participants in this study all identified problems when revealing their sexuality to their parents. Further, this seems to have been particularly problematical for the fathers. Klein, (cited in Sedgwick 1985:23) posits that,

> In the normal development of the little boy's progress towards heterosexuality, he must pass, as Freud says...through the

> stage of the "positive" Oedipus, a homoerotic identification with his father, a position of effeminized subordination to the father, as a condition of finding a model for his own heterosexual role. Conversely, in this theory, the development of the male homosexual requires the postulation of the father's absence or distance and an abnormally strong identification by the child with the mother, in which the child takes the place of the father.

It is striking, in all the interviews, that the relationships between these men and their fathers were weaker than those with their mothers. Alan tells of 'a very strong mother thing during the war' when the men were away fighting, Dan admits he felt 'a lot more protective of [his] mum'. All were very close to their mothers and describe their relationships with great fondness.

Whilst all tell of very strong bonds with their mothers, they often describe either absent, or what they perceived as, weak and ineffectual fathers. Damning comments from Ben such as 'he was just rubbish, rubbish as a dad' and again, 'the man should never have had children' reveal the strength of negative feelings generated by these men. Whilst Ben tries to make excuses for his inadequate father, revealing that 'he comes from that background where, to be fair, he's never known a gay person so I don't expect him to understand the unknown' he does reveal the hurt he felt when 'he would send you a Christmas card and your name was spelt wrong because he had written it when he'd been boozing'. He also points out that his father 'spent most of his time drinking his wages down the pub every Friday night' and that consequently, he 'never bonded with him'. Dan explains that his father 'never took time to know me and he didn't know me and he still doesn't know me'. There is a feeling that these sons were not wanted or accepted by their fathers.

Alan identifies precisely his thoughts that his absent father had a direct correlation to his sexuality. 'Sons now, were a stranger to their father I think this was replicated throughout, all those people who had been left without a father during the war and that was one of the reasons why you had such a thriving gay scene'. How then does this explain siblings, or twins, brought up in the same environment, emerging with a different sexuality? Although three of the interviewees were the only child of the family, two came from larger families. Ben

describes the relationship his father had with his three brothers. 'They were interested in doing things with him like fixing cars and motorbikes and all that sort of thing'. Conversely, he had other interests which were not shared by his father. What they did have in common though, was that they were the youngest of the siblings. Some had also been more profoundly involved in the repercussions of their parents' divorce than the older children. Ben tells that he 'saw the whole thing, the horrible part of the divorce, the arguments and the throwing chairs around'. He explains that he adopted his father's role in many ways. 'I was like the man of the house, I can remember you know, I used to give my mum money from working part time in the supermarket to help buy things and do things around the house'. His loyalty was firmly with his mother and he admits that he 'didn't see a lot of [his father] after they separated'.

According to Bem (1997:133) 'The belief that childhood gender nonconformity leads to later homosexuality is already so widely believed that many parents (especially fathers) already discourage their children (especially sons) from engaging in gender-nonconforming behaviours lest they become homosexual'. Indeed, the interviewees describe how their fathers allowed them to play with certain toys and prohibited others. Some toys were considered gender specific and thus they were allowed to play with some and not with others. David reveals that when he 'was about 3 or 4 years of age I asked for a dolly I had action men but I asked for a dolly' although none was forthcoming as this was not considered an appropriate toy for a boy. John tells of his confusion when his 'dad would make a wooden train he also made me a pram he didn't make me a doll's house but he made me a pig sty and a cow pen and all the male things but also I had a dolly to go in the pram and everything like that as well so I suppose in a way I was given mixed messages'.

It was not only toys which were deemed sex specific. Sports, also, were deemed a male preserve and demonstrated masculinity. David tells that his 'father tried to toughen [him] up, he tried to get [him] to box', John 'had a cricket set' and he and his father 'used to play cricket on the path in the garden and to play football or anything I wasn't keen on football but I used to like hitting the ball about with a bat so you know and he was o.k, about that'. David also tells that his 'dad had very fixed notions of masculinity and that was how he wanted his son to behave'

and he acknowledged that his father 'didn't like the fact that I didn't like to play football I wasn't sporty'.

Messner (1992:27) notes that 'it is in boys' relationships with fathers that we find many of the keys to the emotional salience of sport in the development of masculine identity'. Indeed, he quotes (1992:24) Zane Grey who said, 'All boys love baseball. If they don't they're not real boys'. From the stories of my interviewees, there seems to have been a direct correlation, in the minds of their fathers, between sport and heterosexual masculinity. It seems to follow too, that if they directed their sons into 'manly' sports, and forbade feminine activities, then they would grow into 'real men'.

In all cases where the father knew of the son's homosexuality, they had a problem dealing with and accepting it. Ben observes that 'it's the dad that has the problem, thinks they will grow out of it, thinks they can have some hormones for it, or take them down the pub for a pint or a game of football and they'll be alright'. This insight indicates that homosexuality is often perceived as an illness or a phase from which the gay man will recover. Dan recalls that his father 'had very fixed views about homosexuality he actually saw homosexuality as a mental disorder he actually saw somebody who was homosexual as a criminal and somebody who was mentally ill'. David's narrative echoes this view when he describes how his father 'said something about... never have anything to do with men like that they are sick they are ill they are criminals and words to the effect that... they don't deserve to live'.

There was never a sense of lauding the positive aspects of the son, whether it be because of or in spite of his sexuality. For the fathers, sexuality seems to be the overriding category by which they judge their sons. Ben feels this very strongly and suggests that 'if it were a girl being lesbian I think fathers wouldn't be projecting in the same way they might still have difficulties with it but it's not, it's a different kind of difficulty, but a gay son ... it's like they failed somehow isn't it? Their masculinity is in question'.

Even when the fathers knew of their sons' sexuality, there is little evidence that the subject was discussed. Alan describes the unspoken acceptance by his father, which 'he accepted and nothing was ever said'. John describes how 'when I told my parents my dad took a long time to come to terms with it although he didn't say anything about it, he accepted that this was how I was and he didn't

know how to ask me about it'. David describes the sense of hiding the knowledge and being unable to discuss the topic openly with his father, he admits that 'I think my dad must have known but I never said anything'.

This is not the case with mothers, where there seems to have been more of an openness which is lacking between the fathers. This lack of communication reinforced the ignorance and misunderstanding concomitant with homosexuality. Ben recognised that his father 'saw homosexuals and paedophiles as two together he couldn't separate them' but could not discuss it with him to educate him and so the misconception continued.

Although some of the interviewees felt comfortable discussing their sexuality with their mothers, one admits that he 'couldn't actually face saying to my mother well o.k. I'm homosexual' but acknowledges that when she did find out, she was accepting of the situation, even though they never sat down and talked about it.

Whilst making sense of the issues fathers have when their sons identify as homosexual, Butler (1999:49) explores the patriarchal tendency of western society. She suggests that men use women, be they daughters or wives, in order to establish their own masculine identity and through the cultural constructions of marriage, they use women as 'the object of exchange that both consolidates and differentiates kinship'. Further, when they marry, she argues that the women are 'given as gifts from one patrilineal clan to another'. Thus, Butler posits, they both 'facilitate trade' and also 'consolidate the internal bonds, the collective identity of each clan'. She suggests that in such a contract, the woman 'reflects masculine identity precisely through being the site of its absence'. Butler states that this 'patrilineality is secured through the ritualistic importation of women [who]...not only secure the reproduction of the name but effect a symbolic intercourse between clans of men'. If this is held to be true, it could explain the difficulty fathers have in accepting a homosexual son. This offspring cannot be 'traded' in marriage as a daughter might. He is not legitimate currency for this type of cultural exchange. Moreover, the homosexual progeny cannot fulfil the role of husband in a later transaction, wherein the father's masculinity would be reinforced and the patrilineal status of the clan reinforced.

This might explain the feelings of shame and failure experienced by the father and transposed onto the aberrant son. As Connell (1987:108) suggests, 'Sustaining hegemonic definitions of masculinity is often an issue of importance,

and homosexual men attract hostility partly because they undermine these definitions'. This is certainly true for the men in this study. If this is the case, then the continued silence and lack of communication between the father and son, eliminates any possibility of coming to terms and rationalising these feelings, if indeed this could be possible.

In this chapter, I have identified six recurring themes; awareness of being different, being visibly gay, secrecy, bullying, coming out and relationships with fathers, which arose from the interviews with my participants. I deemed these to be important to each of the men and worthy of further study. I have drawn relevant, related information from each of the interviews and have aligned these with associated literature on the topic, attempting to find meaning and rationalisation for the men's experiences. As Roberts (2002:76) highlights, 'some critics might suggest that analysis loses sight of what is being sought – knowledge and understanding of "real lives"'. However, I feel that identifying and analysing themes which are recurrent in these five life stories, add weight to the importance of these topics. In the next chapter, I draw conclusions from this study.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

'I'm simply talking about making a pattern. That's what I'm doing with all this stuff – offering a cohesion to that random catalogue of deliberate achievement and sheer accident that constitutes your life and that cohesion will be a narrative that people will read and be satisfied by. And that narrative will be as true and as objective as I can make it.'

Brian Friel, *Making History*
Act 2 sc ii

In this study, I have examined the life stories of five gay men and have used their recollections and narratives to explore their experiences in British society today. According to Denzin (1982:82) 'biographical work must always be interventionist, seeking to give notice to those who may otherwise not be allowed to tell their story or who are denied a voice to speak' and in this study, I sought to do so by providing a platform for my subjects to tell their stories. They have all lived their lives partially shrouded in secrecy and this study has allowed them to speak without fear of consequence.

Aspects of the stories shared in these interviews have been painful for the men to recount. They tell of past insults, prejudice and unfairness. Nonetheless, the telling of these incidents may be considered a cathartic experience for these men, to be able to share them and to express their feelings, albeit about events long since past, has been, they acknowledge, curative to some extent. Indeed, Denzin (1997:10) suggests that there is a therapeutic element to the process. 'For those whose stories are being told, it is often their opportunity to unburden themselves'. He also suggests that the story told 'can also illustrate a multiplicity of truths. Fact and fiction merge in the telling of the story, but this doesn't make it any less true for the narrator' (1997:239). To be able to tell of past events, which hurt them deeply, without interruption and without question, has allowed these men a freedom of expression which may not have been afforded them before. Ben, when recounting a bullying incident which left him unfit to work, told his story in an uninterrupted monologue of twenty minutes duration. The anger, frustration and hurt were tangible.

That is not to suggest that all these stories are of negative experiences. Indeed, they include a cornucopia of life's events; relating the funny, the sad, the embarrassing and the puzzling events which make up a life story. But what all the subjects have in common is the overriding conviction that their homosexual identity has had an overwhelming influence on every aspect of their lives; including their childhood, adolescence, education, choice of employment and relationships with family and friends. Even if this has not necessarily been the case, the fact that they believe it, has influenced every aspect of their lives.

I take the liberty here to quote a rather long passage from the autobiography of an American writer, Kirk Read (2003:220), called *How I Learned to Snap*. The extract comes from the last page of the book where he is recounting an incident

when a fellow student had to present a paper to the class on the person he most admired. In my view, it aptly illustrates the experiences of a gay man, which a heterosexual person can never completely understand, but with which they may be able to empathise.

> 'Kirk Read is the Authentic Man,' he said.
>
> All the breath rushed out of me. I sank back into my desk and put my hands flat so no one could see how much I was shaking.
>
> Preston went on for three pages about how I'd been true to myself at great personal risk. He called me brave for coming out and said he'd learned a new definition of honesty, by watching me live. He told a story about how, in eighth grade, I kicked a boy out of a slumber party for using the word *faggot*. He said he knew several kids in school who hadn't come out yet but told Preston I made them feel safer. A lot of what he said was news to my classmates. They knew I was gay, but I doubt they'd ever thought about the shit you take when you're out in high school. As he spoke, I kept thinking *I got away with it.*
>
> He finished, looking directly at me and swinging the final stapled page back to its place. Then people started clapping. I don't know who started, and I don't remember how long it went on. My eardrums were rattling, like I was in an airplane about to touch ground.
>
> I couldn't look up. While they were clapping, my mind raced through every indignity I'd ever sustained at that fucking school, sometimes from people who were now clapping. Every shove, every epithet, every time I was too scared to walk down a certain hallway. Every time I got threatened. Every time I didn't report it. Every time I got called *sissy* or *faggot* or *homo.* Every time I sat in class waiting for a teacher to mention gay people. Every time they didn't. Every long walk to the cafeteria. Every time I stopped breathing in the locker room while I stripped to my underwear. Every time I saw a girl wearing her boyfriend's class ring... Every time I burped up acid because my stomach was churning so hard. Every second I spent assessing how I dressed, how I walked,

whether I lisped. Every hour I spent writing the things I couldn't say out loud. Every time I shared those words with other people.

This account epitomises the subtle nuances of homophobic bullying which might only be evident to the victim. The subjects of my study have all experienced these incidents to varying degrees of severity, and all are considerations for gay men which are not necessarily the same for heterosexual men, even if they, too, have been bullied.

Although someone who has never experienced homophobic bullying, cannot begin to imagine what it must be like and what actions hurt and insult the victim, there is a place in autobiographical studies for sympathy and reconstructive imagination. Erben (1998:10) cites Hume's view on the human ability to sympathise as a unique emotion.

> No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from or even contrary to our own.

In the telling, my subjects have chosen what to reveal and what to conceal about the events which make up their lives. Derrida (cited in Smith 1995:58) posits that in any autobiographical text, the subject is constantly making choices about what to include and what to leave out; the choice may be made by the importance placed upon an event by the subject, or even by the desire to forget or ignore an event. This conscious shaping of a life story is reinforced by Denzin (1997:24) as he describes the autobiography as 'an imaginative organisation of experience that imposes a distortion of truth.' This distortion is produced by the exclusions and the choices made.

Necessarily, autobiography is a revisionist account, inasmuch as the events revealed took place in the past and the subjects have had time, perhaps, to come to terms with what happened to them and to rationalise the events in their own minds. They may also have revised incidents, which may have been too painful at the time and the only way of coping with them has been to put another slant on

them, to view them from another angle. In this study, they have put their own interpretation on events and recounted their own feelings and reactions.

Their account of the reactions of others must be open to interpretation. For example, all tell of their mothers' reactions to the news of their gayness. This is their perception of the event, which again may be skewed or misunderstood. Interviews with their mothers would make a pertinent topic of a separate study. From my own experience, my gay son might tell a very different story of my reaction when he came out to me. I already knew he was gay and it was no shock to me. What did shock me was the strength of his emotion when admitting that it was the hardest thing in the world to tell me; more so than telling anyone else. This was mirrored in the experiences of my interviewees, who all confided that their mother was the most difficult person to tell. I was deeply hurt at the time, but since have come to understand that, had I rejected him, it would have been crushing for him. What he also did not understand is that I love him in his entirety, not in spite of his homosexuality. If he were not gay, he would not be the same person. The characteristics which I admire in him and which make me proud, may well be different if he were heterosexual.

If I feel like this, then perhaps the mothers of the gay men in my study may feel similar emotions. The men can only recount their perceptions; not those of their mothers. Similarly, other influential people in their lives do not have a voice in this study and therefore it is only the men themselves who can surmise what the feelings were as they describe their family's reactions.

Another consideration when writing biographies and researching autobiographies is the Reader Response Theory. According to Benton (1992:4) 'with the reader's creative participation as the central tenet, perception is viewed as interpretive; reading is not the discovering of meaning...but the creation of it'. He explains that this theory 'focuses on the complex manipulation of the reader's viewpoint that is found in narrative'. Benton calls this the 'shifting viewpoint', which generates perspectives in a constant state of flux, according to the readers' responses. Iser (cited in Benton 1992:5) states that there is a 'concern with an analysis of what actually happens when one is reading a text, for that is when a text begins to unfold its potential; it is in the reader that the text comes to life'. The reading requires participation from the reader in order to reach the people behind the words. Consequently, the stories and experiences of my participants will be

received differently, according to the reader. Thus, the biographies recreated here have three contributors; the subject, the narrator and the reader, thereby producing constantly differing stories. De Certeau (cited in Denzin 1997:237) confirms that 'the text only has meaning through its readers; it changes along with them'. Denzin (1997:239) also cites Ulmer's view that reading is done through the 'sting of memory', thereby creating a different reading because of past experiences. Readers will sometimes look for particular meanings in the text, needing to identify with their own experiences and mirror those in someone else's experiences. For those who live on the margins and are denied a place from which to speak, they read to identify shared experiences and to know they are not alone.

In a wider context, if we accept that homosexuality is a construct of cultural expectations within a predominantly heterosexual society, then it becomes particularly difficult for gay men to adequately describe their experiences if they cannot comprehend a heterosexual life. Their perception of 'normal' is not the same because they have been taught that their feelings are 'abnormal'. They can only recount their experiences in response to reactions by others: a reaction of a society which views them as abnormal or deviant. Denzin (1997:236) suggests that the subject of a biography presents a 'multiplicity of fragmented and contradictory discourses' and this can be held true for the homosexual man trying to explain his life, his loves and his emotions to a heterosexual audience.

As a heterosexual woman carrying out this research, I wonder if the results, or indeed the interaction with the participants, would have been different had I been male or lesbian. This is something I have considered when reflecting on my findings. Indeed, I constantly questioned whether I could properly convey, relate and analyse the responses of these men when I brought my own social conditioning into the equation. I acknowledge that I am a product of my environment and era and I recognise that this, too, has a bearing on my ability to research this topic. Thus I question whether I have been able to be objective as a researcher. I have sought to overcome this by making self-reflective notes throughout the process, which I have not included here, in an attempt to assess my objectivity, or impact. A factor I had not anticipated, was that I would become so emotionally involved in the interviews and the stories of the interviewees. All had an unforeseen impact, which affected me for some time afterwards but, because of

the confidentiality issues, I was only able to discuss with my supervisor and thus off load these feelings.

In acknowledging this possible limitation to my study, I also draw on the work of Erben, Warnock, Kant and Hume regarding the importance of imagination in biographical studies. Erben (1998:10) states that

> it is unfortunate that the employment of imagination has been played down or ignored in works on social science method. This is a profound mistake because it lies at the centre of qualitative interpretation and is so implicated in epistemology as to be of its essence.

It is the use of imagination which can link the stories told and the world in which we live. Further, it can enrich the analysis of the data and fill in the gaps in narratives. That is not to say that the analysis should then become a fiction: rather the imagination should only be used when based on secure empirical references. This is all the more accurate when the empirical references are revealed in common experiences amongst the participants of the study. Erben (1998:11) adroitly explains how this 'allows the imagination of the researcher to draw conclusions from data that are neither given directly in the data nor arrived at through numerical reasoning – in other words such conclusions are provided by imagination.'

Ultimately, when carrying out the analysis of my data, I have drawn out what I consider to be the pivotal themes: what I considered to be quintessential. I asked my subjects to tell their stories, with very little direction from me, in order to allow their priorities to emerge. Having said this, Roberts (2002:52) suggests that the life story of an individual is 'based on an interactive, collaborative encounter'. Later, choices were made. I did not go back to my subjects to confirm or clarify details, as I felt that this might possibly skew my results, having given them time for reflection. I wanted their first response and their first recollections, rather than a revisionist account of events. As I acknowledged previously, I did not want to lead their narratives in any way through my questions, and similarly, I did not want to suggest a possible response by revisiting their narratives.

Throughout the research, I was careful not to allow pre-conceived ideas of what I would find to colour my analysis and indeed, some of my findings surprised

me. I had assumed that some experiences would be shared by all my subjects, such as childhood bullying, struggling to come to terms with their sexuality and deliberation about coming out. I was surprised when they did not, or at least they assumed a lack of importance for some so that they did not see fit to mention them. I anticipated that time would have a bearing on my findings, but again, was surprised at the outcome. My subject, Alan, who was born in the 1930s, when homosexuality was still illegal, in reality had relatively better experiences in terms of being accepted than some of the younger participants. The prejudice they encountered was never an issue for Alan. This surprised me as I had assumed, wrongly, that British society had become more accepting than in previous decades. This idea was substantiated by the greater visibility of gay relationships within the media and I had come to the conclusion that western society in general is now more accepting of same sex relationships. This proved not to be the case.

In addition to the above, I also had to consider the inaccuracy of language. Expressing feelings accurately can be difficult. Studies have shown that men and women speak differently and subtle nuances can be overlooked. In chapter 4 I considered the work of Lakoff (1975) and Spender (1980) in this context and the differences they have identified in male and female language. Even the vocabulary used can have values attributed to certain words, which may vary according to gender or even location.

When transcribing, I was careful to include paralinguistic features which could convey emotions. Pauses, fillers and hesitations were noted and often coincided with very emotional parts of the narratives. I could only analyse what the subjects told me, but I was aware that their silences held meaning too. Foucault (1978:27) proposes that 'There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things...There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses'. So whilst I had no way of identifying what lay behind the silences and omissions, I was aware of their existence and the potential for a different story. This does not lessen the credibility of the story told, rather it suggests that it is one of several possible stories.

As far as possible, I resisted the temptation to punctuate and tidy up these transcripts, realising that by doing so, I could engender different meanings from

those expounded by the interviewees. I found that often they would return to particularly emotional events in their lives, almost as if they wanted to ensure they had expressed themselves accurately and their meaning was clear. Some even articulated that they wanted to return to a previous subject when out of context with the current topic under discussion.

Denzin (1989:14) notes some of these problems are inherent in biographical research when he again quotes from Derrida (1972:81)

> there is no clear window into the inner life of a person, for any window is always filtered through the glaze of language, signs and the process of signification. And language, in both its written and spoken forms, is always inherently unstable, in flux, and made up of the traces of other signs and symbolic statements.

This parallax, or change in position of either observer or subject, will necessarily produce differing representations and accounts of the same experiences, different voices articulating different reactions to the same experience. Homophobic experiences will necessarily be different, according to either the perpetrator or the victim and his account of it. The meaning of any narrative can only be analysed by exploring what is said and what is left unsaid. Indeed, this begs the question of whether a reading or an interpretation can ever be accurate. Clarke (1998:36) confirms that 'it is acknowledged that we are all differently positioned and privileged and that this impacts on how we view and interpret our own lives as well as those we seek to understand.'

Given all these limitations and potential imprecision, I have presented this study as accurately as possible and given a voice to this minority group. Clarke (1998:48) states that her 'research continues to seek to give voice to [lesbian teachers'] silenced voices and in so doing to render visible their oppressions and to challenge and change this unjust social order which leaves these teachers caught in the closet of the classroom.' I believe that this study has given voice to the gay men who agreed to be interviewed and has captured their feelings of powerlessness, marginalisation and frustration, albeit at times with a veneer of humour. There is a common perception amongst them that this alienation and marginalisation is unavoidable and to be expected. As gay men, they believe they

can expect no better treatment and are grateful when their negative experiences are relatively mild.

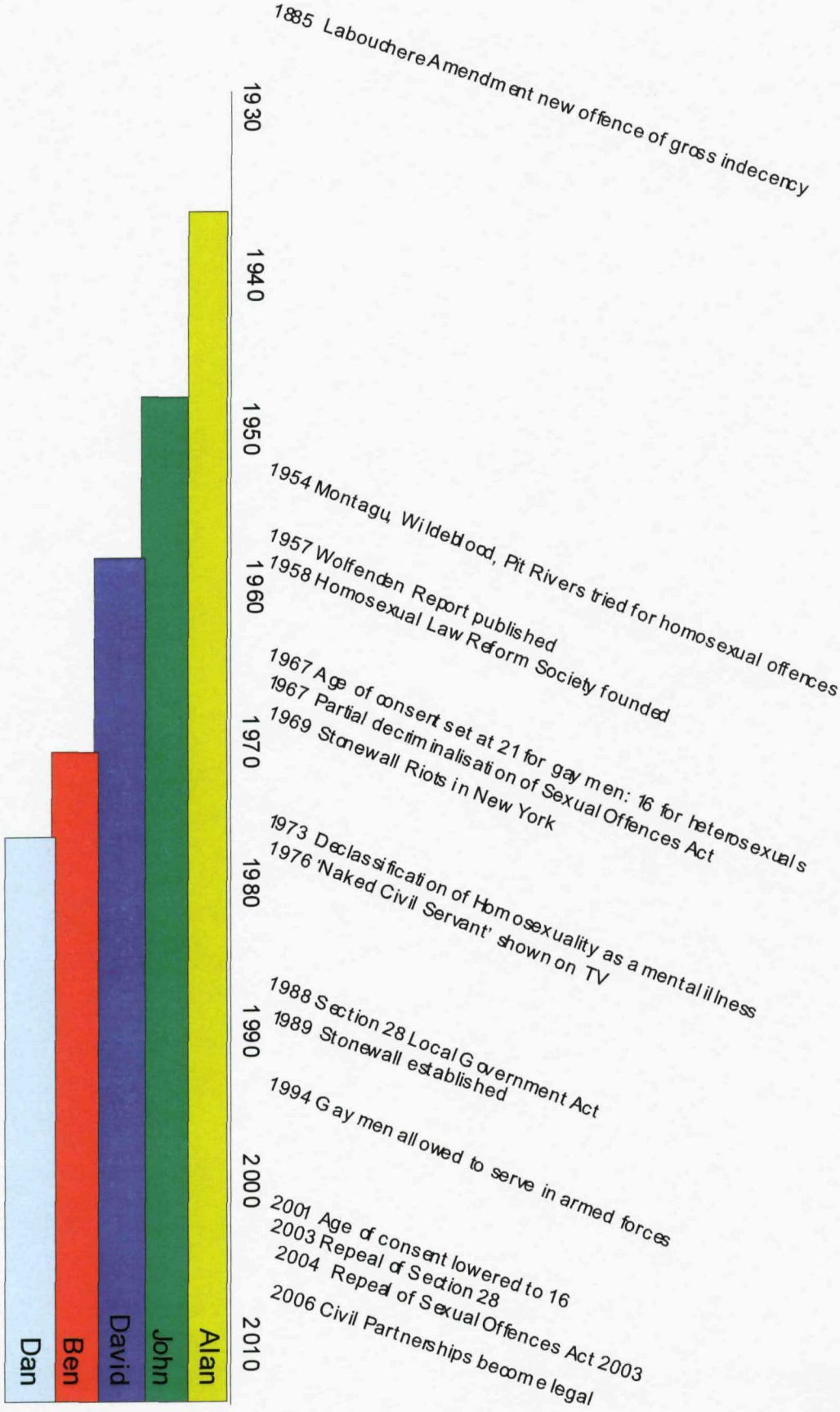
During the analysis of the data, I had feelings of misgivings at trying to get behind the stories and put my own interpretations on what I had been told. In particular, I felt as if I were intruding and that my interpretations could be wrong. I questioned what right I had to explore what these men had meant to say. Josselson and Lieblich (1995:ix) posit that when interpreting a life story, the interviewer 'must decode, recognise, recontextualise or abstract that life in the interest of reaching a new interpretation of the raw data of experience before us'. I have taken care to ensure that I have managed to do this.

I felt uncomfortable when I noted contradictions in the stories; when the men were perhaps showing bravado about a really difficult situation and I saw through that, to the real hurt underneath the veneer. I felt like a voyeur. I also wrestled with my conscience in that I wanted to show my analysis to the men to get their opinions about what I had written. My dilemma there was that I did not want to change my analysis, because then it would no longer be my own interpretation but rather, their explanation. I felt that what they had told me at the time of the interview, had come from the heart and they hadn't had time to edit or revise their feelings and responses. This I felt was an accurate representation of their lives and experiences at that point of time, whereas if they had time to read and react to the analysis, it might lose some of this honesty and openness. However, when asked, I did agree to let Alan read my analysis of his interview, and he expressed his delight at the accuracy and perception of the study. I felt that in some measure, this authenticated my study and rendered the analysis credible.

When evaluating my research methods, I still believe that the 'open' interview was the best method to elicit the information I sought. Further, tape recording the interviews and transcribing afforded the best method of recording the data. If I were to repeat this research, I still would undertake a 'one-off interview' and not return for a second interview, because by then, the subjects would have had time to revise their information, had time to consider what they wanted to tell me, rather than letting the information emerge as their memories surfaced. I feel that I have achieved what I set out to do. I have not come up with any ground breaking conclusions, but nonetheless I have offered some original insights and I have given these five men the opportunity to tell their stories. I have used current

literature to analyse these stories and to make some coherence of their experiences in modern British society. Much of this literature emanated from America, and it is conceivable that there may be differences in experiences in a different culture. Nevertheless, many of the theories were relevant across the divide and made sense, or gave focus, to the common experiences within their stories. I hope that this work will be read by other gay men and will reassure them that their experiences, particularly if they have been bullied because of their homosexuality, are shared by others and can be overcome.

Appendix 1



Timeline for Gay Legislation and Milestones

Fig. 1

Appendix 2

Address

15th February 2006

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview for my research project. Any information which I collect will be used solely for academic purposes and the source will remain completely anonymous.

I propose, with your permission, to tape the interview, type up the transcript and return this to you for any changes you may wish to make. When I have collected all the data from the other participants, I shall use the information to write my thesis, which will be submitted to the University of Southampton.

This information may be used at a later date in academic papers or academic literature.

If you agree to these terms and are willing to continue with the interview, please countersign this letter and I will enclose your copy with the draft transcript which I shall send you.

Kind regards

....

Bev Luckman Interviewee

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

At what age were you first aware of your sexuality?

At what age did you become aware that you were gay?

At what age did you tell a friend about your sexuality?

At what age did you tell your mother/father/parents that you were gay?

Can you remember any particular events in your life which generated huge changes for you?

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